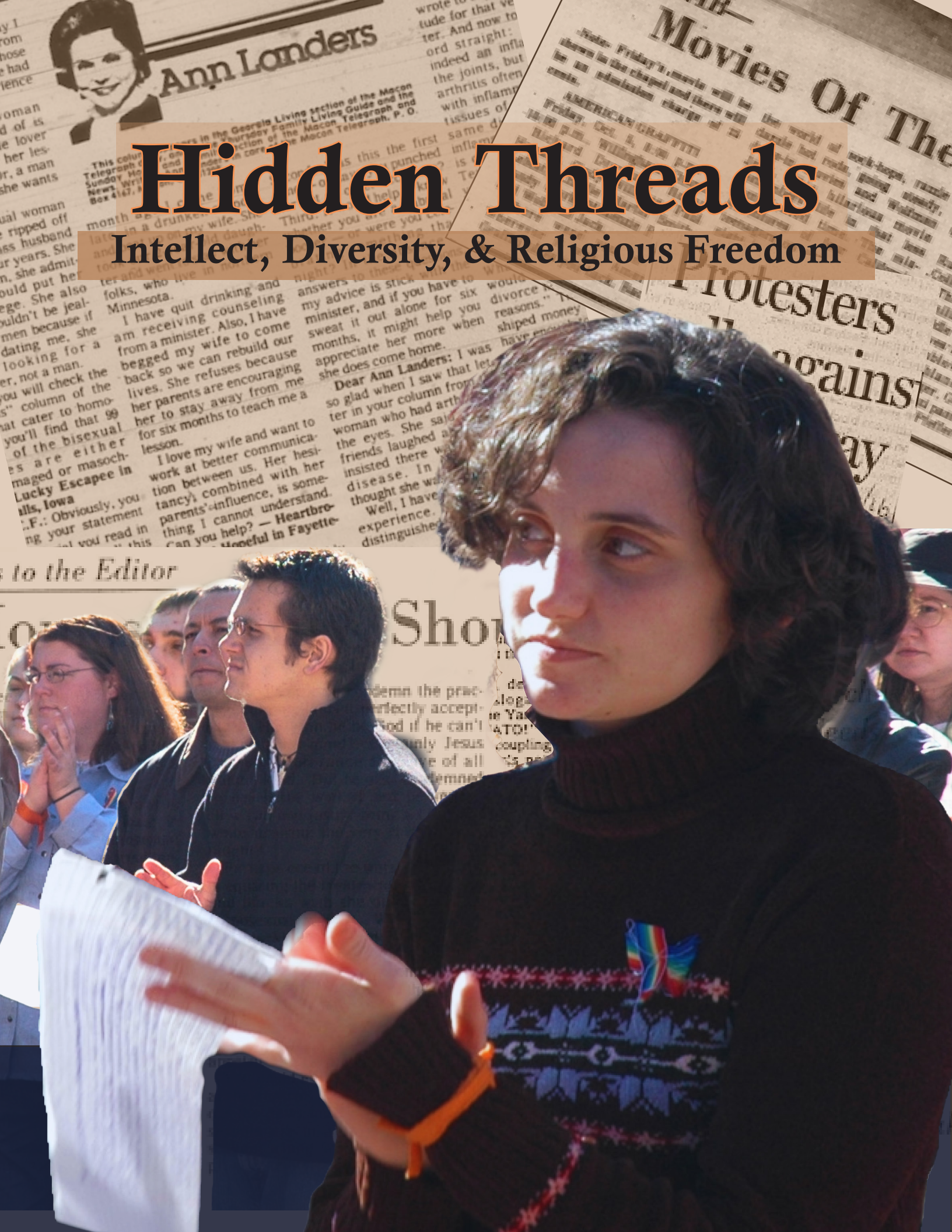


Hidden Threads

Intellect, Diversity, & Religious Freedom



Hidden Threads

Intellect, Diversity & Religious Freedom

**Written By: Bekehm Mohn; Savannah French;
Alyson Tidwell; Raven Dupree & Grey Morrison**



**Dedicated to Mercer University's Archives
From the
My Name Matters Campaign**

Content Advisory

This book contains subject material that may be disturbing or upsetting to some readers, including discussions of death and discriminatory language and behaviors.

The My Name Matters Campaign recognizes that archival systems often fail to collect or maintain historical content regarding the lives and experiences of people of color. The team that worked to develop the historical timeline here at Mercer have attempted to restore this history to the best of our ability. We ask readers to keep in mind the many voices that should be included here but are missing from the historical record.

Additionally, some discriminatory language does appear throughout this account, which ranges from the 1950s to 2024. Although this content does not represent the current views of Mercer University or the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the majority of materials collected for this book came directly from the Mercer Archives and reflect some homophobic and transphobic ideas, particularly surrounding Mercer's 2005 - 2006 separation from the Georgia Baptist Convention.

This book is meant to encourage honest and truthful reflection on Mercer's history and to spur conversation about where we've been and where we're going. If and when controversies arise from the text, we welcome public discussion (an integral step in recognizing Mercer's true history), learning from our past, and creating a community that embodies the principles of intellectual diversity and religious freedom.

A digital-only first edition was released on October 11, 2024.

This second edition was released on January 16th 2025

Both are available at Mercer's Archives, Special Collections, & Digital Initiatives Department

Thank you

Introduction

Why This Book?

Hidden Threads: Intellect, Diversity, and Religious Freedom was a year-long project led by Mercer undergraduate Bekehm Mohn who noticed a lack of recognition for LGBTQ+ Mercerians, past and present. The initiative is a part of Mercer's Applied Social Justice Certification program and is headed by the student-run My Name Matters Campaign. The campaign headed the 'Hidden Threads' project and recruited the research team through Common Ground. This research study was designed to explore and analyze the complex historical events leading up to Mercer University and the Georgia Baptist Convention severing their longstanding 172-year-old financial and institutional relationship.

With the materials stored in the Mercer University Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, we compiled a concise timeline of important events and moments of public debate. We recruited a team of passionate students to conduct research on this issue. Our team consisted of all LGBTQ+ identifying students dedicated to restoring queer history at Mercer. Each contributor conducted research and interviewed Mercer faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other influential figures from Mercer's history.

Hidden Threads delves into topics including Mercer's development and implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies; the severance between the Georgia Baptist Convention and Mercer; the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ people on campus; and the personal experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ+ Mercerians. Through this comprehensive exploration, the project aims to shed light on the historical significance of the LGBTQ+ community at Mercer and create a more inclusive and supportive environment on campus.

To read full interviews from this project please access, *The Treatment of Us*. It is available at Jack Tarver Library at Mercer's Archives, Special Collections, & Digital Initiatives Department.

Team Bios

Bekehm Mohn (They/Them)

Campaign Director, Principle Investigator, Class of 2025

About:

I am from Augusta, Georgia. I am a first-generation college student and I am from a low-income background. I grew up in a southern Baptist household, with my four other siblings—making me the middle child.

Why did you start this project?

I initiated this project for a few reasons. My first year enrolled, I was surprised to find out that Mercer had not implemented a preferred name policy or some kind of system to allow students, faculty, and staff to be called by their name of choice. I felt disappointed by this lack of inclusion at Mercer so I decided to try to change it. I advocated for the “preferred name policy” and my campaign was a success. The policy was implemented in fall 2022.

However, not many know about my advocacy. So I asked myself, “Who else has done the work? Who else put in the effort to allow me to have the access to even run a campaign like I did?” I had no idea about the Mercer Triangle Symposium or the Georgia Baptist Convention Severance. I had no idea who April Trussell was or the history of LGBT+ Mercerians. It was a representation I was proud to know we have at Mercer, people I can look to. I want all students to know about their representation at Mercer, the trailblazers and activists. Bringing this timeline together brings credit to all the LGBT+ Mercerians and allies of our history. The hard work of the University, students, and faculty to protect academic and religious freedom needs to be known. Mercer students of past and present need access to this history. I am proud that I have had a great team help me bring this history back to Mercerians.



Savannah French

Co-Principle Investigator, Class of 2025

About:

I am from McDonough, GA, and I am the oldest of two children. I grew up with exposure to multiple denominations of Christianity (Baptist, Methodist, Catholic) due to my parent's different religious backgrounds. While at Mercer, I have been studying psychology and women's and gender studies.

Why did you join this project?

In my sophomore year at Mercer, I took multiple classes that were focused on completing research projects related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and social justice issues on campus. While previously I had been focusing on learning about social issues in the world as a whole, I became interested in also learning about social issues on a smaller scale. When I heard about this project, this seemed like a great way to increase my knowledge in this area and use what

I had learned in those previous classes to try and help Mercer move towards being a more inclusive environment. In my conversations with people on campus, most people do not know about queer history as it relates to Mercer. However, I think that it is important for people to have access to this history not only to emphasize that this history matters but to also let future student activists on campus know what has already been done and where they can go from there in terms of making the campus more inclusive for queer students.



Raven Dupree (She/Her)

Interview Coordinator, Graphic Designer, Class of 2027

About:

I was born in Tallahassee, Florida. My family and I moved to Warner Robins, Georgia later on and that's where I lived before attending Mercer as a marketing and graphic design major. I grew up in a family with a strong Baptist background on both sides, and I have a little brother and a dog.

Why did you join this project?

I joined this project because I know how it feels to not have your actions recognized, to see those that have wronged you have the privilege of ignoring the consequences of their actions, and to go about life knowing that people have a negatively skewed view of a situation instead of the full story. I am passionate about correcting these circumstances to prevent others from experiencing them. So, when I heard about how little LGBTQ+ representation there was in the Mercer Archives, I was immediately drawn in. As someone who is queer, I understand how one can be affected by not having proper representation. I only became more invested as I learned more about the various events and the people who were involved.

This entire process has been an enlightening experience, because I have been able to learn about events through the people who have experienced them. I have been able to hear many different perspectives and great things that could not be read about in the archives. Furthermore, I am happy to be a part of this initiative that can change that and allow others to read about these events and people in the archives. With that being said, the interviews were definitely my favorite part. Overall, I have enjoyed working with the other amazing people who are involved in this project.



Alyson Taylor Tidwell (She/they)

Interviewer & Editor, Class of 2025

About:

I am from Macon, Georgia. I am a first generation college student. I grew up in a household with my mom, dad, and younger sibling.

Why did you join this project?

As a queer student at Mercer, I found myself disappointed with the lack of historical representation I saw in our archives. Reading the limited history of queer students in *The Mercer Reader* inspired me to want to learn more about the LGBTQ+ students and allies that came before me and made it possible to feel comfortable in my skin at Mercer.

I was especially inspired by the work of April Trussell. Reading her writings and speeches in *The Mercer Reader*, as well as watching her speak in the video from the *We Are Mercer* rally that is a detailed part of our campaign reminded me that there *are* folks out there who care about the rights and comfort of queer individuals in educational environments. I knew that I also wanted to be one of those folks so the queer students who come after me know that they have a safe place at Mercer.



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I, Bekehm, am deeply grateful to my family and friends, for their unwavering support and patience during the writing process. Your love and belief in me kept me motivated. Thank you to:

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Dr. Amber M. Ingram

DeMarcus Beckham
Ceallsach Crouch

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We also appreciate the work of Navigating Omitted Minds Overtime (NOMO), The Macon Historic Foundation and Washington Memorial Library's Genealogical & Historical Room, and DeMarcus Beckham for their resources and support.

Lastly, I would like to thank you, readers, for your interest in our work. I hope this book resonates with you and inspires your own journey.

Thank you all!

What Are The Archives?

Georgia Baptists began preserving their history in the nineteenth century.¹ In 1878, the Georgia Baptist Historical Society formed and secured a room in the library of Mercer University, where they collected Southern Baptist Convention annuals, minutes from numerous associations and the state convention, and books by Georgia Baptist authors. However, the Georgia Baptist Historical Society died out by 1888, and the collection it had gathered was lost to Baptists in general and even to Mercer people by 1912. A Methodist librarian, Dr. Charles H. Stone, renewed interest in the collection in 1943.

The Georgia Baptist Convention established a permanent group known as “The Committee on Baptist History” in 1947. Its members were well-educated pastors, professors, and denominational leaders, but the committee seldom if ever referenced outside historians or archivists. The Committee on Baptist History cooperated with the Georgia Baptist Convention and by 1957 collected all recoverable minutes of associations. The Southern Baptist Historical Commission filled in missing minutes from its own collection and that of the American Baptist Historical Society. The Committee on Baptist History placed historical markers at significant sites across the state and helped preserve and restore those sites. It also cooperated with the Southern Baptist Historical Commission in compiling and publishing the two-volume Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists. In 1964, the Committee on Baptist History helped establish the Georgia Baptist Historical Society by consulting with appropriate authorities, mailing letters to potential supporters, and publishing announcements of the upcoming meeting in The Christian Index. Seventy-eight people gathered at Mercer to organize the Georgia Baptist Historical Society. Dr. Spencer B. King gave a formal address to the group.²

The Jack Tarver Library at Mercer University served as the depository for materials in the Society’s possession. Librarians Charles H. Stone and Daniel L. Metts, Jr. maintained the collection, and Mary Overby became the first full-time worker. The relationship between the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Committee on Baptist History, the University, and the Society can be difficult to delineate at first glance. The Society decided to remain independent from the convention and the history committee, although it wished to cooperate with them as much as possible.

¹ D. Williams, “Precious Memories: “The Creation of Baptist Archives in Alabama and Georgia” Paper presented at May 2021 annual meeting of the Baptist History and Heritage Society., 12 -18.

² D. Williams, “Precious Memories: “The Creation of Baptist Archives in Alabama and Georgia” Paper presented at May 2021 annual meeting of the Baptist History and Heritage Society., 14.

Daniel Williams, University Head Archivist, and Mercer Alumn Class of 2007

Daniel Williams at the time of this publication is the University Archivist and Head of Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives. Williams began working in Mercer's archives in 2017. However, Williams first encountered the archives when he was an undergraduate student at Mercer. Raven Dupree leads his interview.³

What made you go into the archives?

“[I will] try to keep this short. I worked up here when I was a student, and I got up here as a student because some of my family members were friends with the archivists at the time. So when she found out I was coming to Mercer, she asked if I wanted to work up here and I said yes. And so I worked up here, and then that’s– I liked it, and the rest is history.”



The goal of this project is to curate a book that condenses LGBTQ+ history at Mercer. How would you feel about that?

“As the archivist, that’s gonna fill a huge gap in the sources that we have, because we get questions about LGBTQ topics on campus. And currently, we have, you know, maybe a few little files that have been filled with stuff here and there, but this is gonna beef that up greatly. So this is something that we’re really excited about from the archives perspective because it helps us out a lot. And it helps y’all out.”

So what does that book look like to you in terms of its content?

“I think the part that is going to be just personally interesting is the part about the split with the GBC. Hearing, you know, how different people reacted to that, is gonna be interesting because that’s also a popular topic, particularly with students and professors.”

Why did you decide to participate in our archives project and help us facilitate that research?

“Because this– I mean, this is a gap in the student record and Mercer that we need to fill. And I mean this– I mean, it’s a win– I mean, it’s a win-win!”

³ Daniel William, interview by Raven Dupree, Mercer University, [January 31,, 2024].



Part I

(1920-2000)

The Fundamentalist Effect on Mercer University

We would like to give special thanks to Ashley Stephens. Her research significantly contributed to understanding the history of Fundamentalism within the Georgia Baptist Convention and its subsequent effects on Mercer University. Stephens presented her essay titled “Fundamentalism and the Fight for Academic Freedom: The Dismissal of Dr. Henry Fox from Mercer University in 1924” at BEAR Day and Engineering Expo in 2020. She was awarded The Valerie B. Edmonds Student Research Award for her work. Her paper is accessible through the University Research, Scholarship, and Archives (URSA) system.
<https://hdl.handle.net/10898/12146>

As many students learn in INT 101 courses and the annual Pilgrimage to Penfield, Jesse Mercer and Adiel Sherwood co-founded Mercer University in the early nineteenth century. They also co-founded the Georgia Baptist Convention. The organization is now known as the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. For the sake of consistency and relevance to the historical material being utilized, the organization will be referred to by its previous name, the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC)¹. Jesse Mercer composed the GBC constitution, thus establishing itself within the Baptist denomination.

Baptist beliefs at the time of the university’s founding required Jesse Mercer to advocate among the Baptist community for higher education. In the early nineteenth century, Baptists did not believe in a form of higher education, as the house of God was considered the sole source of information for all. Members of the Georgia Baptist Convention were opposed to Jesse Mercer’s founding of the university. Mercer acknowledged this in his 1834 speech “Knowledge: Indispensable to a Minister of God.” He stated:

“ That the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all of them that have pleasure therein - He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered-”...Here the phrases, “sought out”, and “to be remembered,” mark the duty to be done in acquiring the knowledge of the works of God. They cannot be sought out and remembered, without effort - without much study and tenacious care...so all good men, but especially ministers of God ought to apply themselves to the acquisition of knowledge.”²

Mercer quoted scripture to argue that people should not seek knowledge from “false teachers” who spoke of being educated but were only regurgitating information without reflection. The GBC respected Jesse Mercer’s beliefs, and the university continued to have a relationship with the Convention for 170 years. These roots however may indicate early opposition due to differing beliefs between the GBC and the university.

¹ Gordon Johnston, et al. eds., *The Mercer Reader*, 2nd ed. (Acton, GA: Copley Custom Textbooks, 2009), 11.

² Jesse Mercer, *Knowledge Indispensable to a Minister of God: Stated and Maintained in a Discourse, Delivered before the Baptist Convention of Georgia, at Indian Creek Meeting House, in Morgan County, Georgia* (Washington, GA: Christian Index Office, 1834).; Gordon Johnston, et al. eds., *The Mercer Reader*, 2nd ed. (Acton, GA: Copley Custom Textbooks, 2009), 11.

³ Jarrett Burch, “Adiel Sherwood (1791-1879),” *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified September 1, 2005, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/adiel-sherwood-1791-1879/>.

⁴ Larry Pettegrew, “A Brief History of Fundamentalism,” *Shepherds Theological Seminary*, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://shepherds.edu/a-brief-history-of-fundamentalism/>.

A main goal of the Convention at the time of its founding according to Jesse Mercer himself was to unionize “all real Christians,” implying Christians of all denominations within the state of Georgia.³ However, a divide developed amongst Baptists. Specifically, Fundamentalist Baptists were often in conflict with other practicing Baptists who did not agree with their perspectives. Between the founding of the university in 1822 and the early 1920s, representation of fundamentalists within the university and GBC increased. Some were on the Board of Trustees and others were elected presidents. This is most prevalent during the 1920s. The fundamentalist movement was at the height of its popularity. The movement got its name from the publication of “The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth.”⁴ This was a series of essays published between 1910 and 1915. A variety of pastors, theologians, and many others who believed in literal interpretations of the Bible and its scripture wrote the series. The essays often criticized other denominations and interpretations of the Bible including Mormonism, Millennial Dawn (Russelites; Jehovah’s Witnesses), Atheism, Evolutionism, Socialism, Christian Science, Spiritualism, and much more.⁵

Fundamentalist beliefs strictly adhere to the literal interpretation of the Bible, therefore their terms were very conservative. They believed in the starkness of good versus evil. Ashley Stephens in her essay “Fundamentalism and the Fight for Academic Freedom: The Dismissal of Dr. Henry Fox from Mercer University in 1924” examines how extreme Fundamentalist Baptist responses were to opposing opinions or concepts—accumulating in an all-out “ideological assault” as they often felt the entire Christian faith had been threatened.⁶ The conservative beliefs of those involved in the 1920s Fundamentalist Baptist movement established that theories of evolution were the most offensive as they suggested the creation of the Earth and Adam were false—inherently challenging the word of God, the Bible.

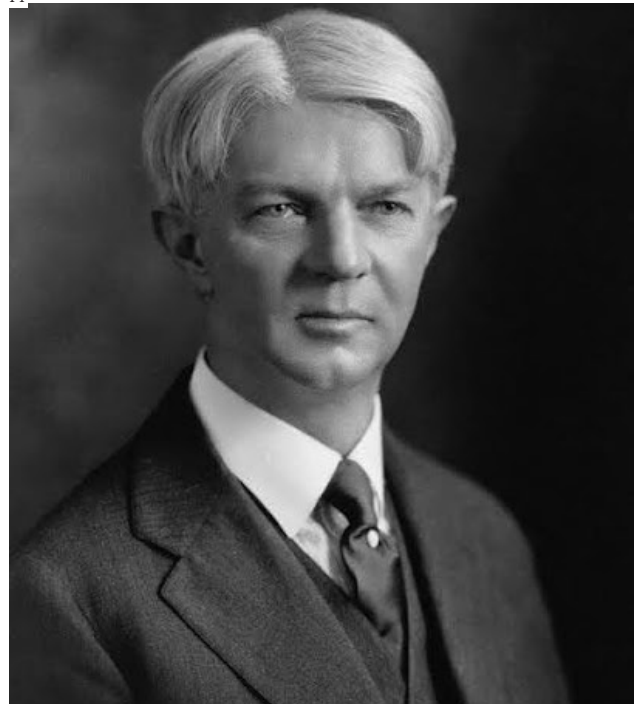
⁵ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118-123, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195300512.003.0015>.

⁶ Ashley Stephens, “Fundamentalism and the Fight for Academic Freedom: The Dismissal of Dr. Henry Fox from Mercer University in 1924,” *Mercer University Research, Scholarship, and Archives*, 2020, 2, <https://hdl.handle.net/10898/12146>.

William Heard Kilpatrick (1871-1965)

It can be theorized that the consistent disagreement on moralities and faith between Mercer University and GBC is sourced to the fundamentalist movement of the 1920s. Fundamental Baptists were regularly elected to represent the Convention committee—despite not officially declaring themselves to be aligned with the school of thought.¹¹ A notable representative of this dynamic was Dr. William Heard Kilpatrick (1871-1965). Kilpatrick was the son of former Georgia Baptist Convention President and member of Mercer University's Board of Trustees Reverend Dr. James Hines Kilpatrick.¹² William Kilpatrick was a Mercer alumnus and later worked at the university as a mathematics professor and was the Vice President from 1903-1905. In his third year as an undergraduate at Mercer University (1889-1890), Kilpatrick came across a controversial text of the time: *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin.

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The text had an enormous impact on Kilpatrick, who like many others at the time was raised in a Fundamental Baptist household. Darwin's work was a supporting aspect to the belief of evolution, a very looked down upon theory by Christians of many denominations but especially Fundamentalists. This information was accepted by Kilpatrick, though he kept it to himself for years. He wished to not disappoint his father, whose two stepsons had recently turned to atheism. Kilpatrick's open-mindedness to alternative interpretations of life and scripture impacted his beliefs.

Kilpatrick taught mathematics at Mercer from 1897 to 1906. There were rumors and concerns of his devotion to the Christian faith, and these concerns were brought up in his interview process to teach at Mercer. It is not certain if his nepotism, an old boy network,* academic prowess, or the fact that he would not be teaching theology excused his history of straying from religion. He served as vice president for two years. During this time, Mercer University president Dr. Charles Smith called Kilpatrick's faith into question. The two disputed in the

**An "old boy network" was "an informal system in which wealthy men with the same social and educational background help each other."¹³ This may have been a way in which William Kilpatrick was able to work for Mercer University, given his nepotistic status and associations with those of influence within the GBC and University.*

¹¹ Ashley Stephens, "Fundamentalism and the Fight for Academic Freedom: The Dismissal of Dr. Henry Fox from Mercer University in 1924," Mercer University Research, Scholarship, and Archives, 2020, 4, <https://hdl.handle.net/10898/12146>.

¹² Charles Jones, "Modernist/Fundamentalist Controversy in Georgia," The Christian Index, May 2, 2022, <https://christianindex.org/stories/modernistfundamentalist-controversy-in-georgia,21316>.

¹³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "Old Boy Network," accessed July 18, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/old%20boy%20network>.

¹⁴ William Heard Kilpatrick, "William Heard Kilpatrick and the Project Method," Master Profesorado, January 14, 2018, <https://masterprofesorado8.wordpress.com/2018/01/14/william-heard-kilpatrick-project-method/>.

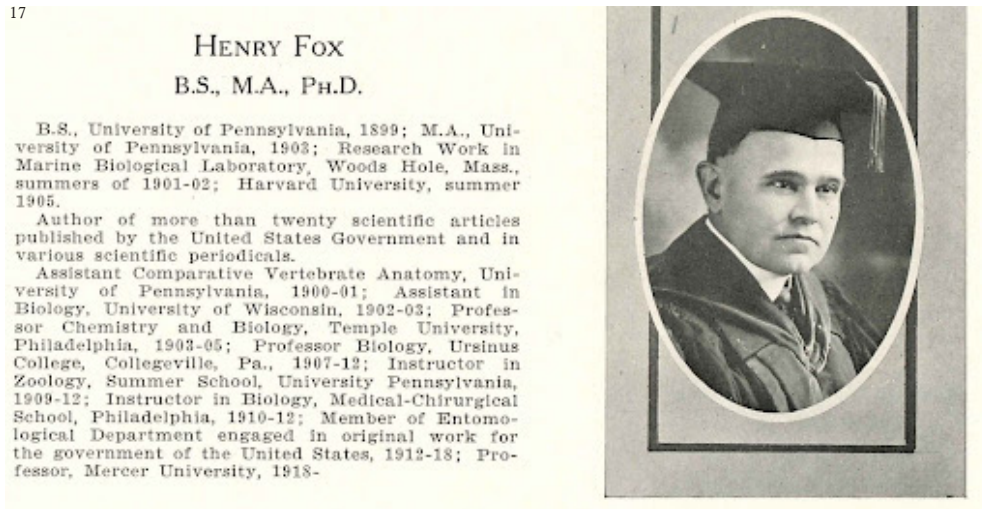
1905-1906 academic year, leading Kilpatrick to submit his resignation. The Board of Trustees, where his father held a position, was wary of this request. Kilpatrick defended his theological beliefs, demonstrating an impressive ability to quote scripture—due to his upbringing in the faith and his PhD studies at Columbia University. After his time at Mercer, Kilpatrick became acclaimed in his research and commitment to the field of education, even being associated with Dr. John Dewey, renowned Psychologist of Learning.

Kilpatrick's resignation implies a certain level of influence from the representatives of the university and Convention that held fundamentalist beliefs. Fundamentalists who were in positions of power in these institutions began to reveal an overarching desire to manage the beliefs of their staff and professors. This may have been heightened as the 1920's fundamentalist movement met its peak of popularity. The influence of professors over their students' religious beliefs could have been a concern of the GBC. Mercer University's elected officials and presidents remained mostly unassociated with the movement in the later decades within the operations of the institution. The Georgia Baptist Convention continued to have fundamentalist representatives within their hierarchy. This led to a rift in opinion on intellectual and religious freedom in regard to the functions of the university—including the Heresy trials of 1924.

Researcher's Comment: If you are interested in learning more about Kilpatrick, consider viewing his archival folder "Kilpatrick BOX 1; Folder 1." Inside are letters from students expressing their regrets that he was leaving Mercer. Personally there were two letters I found of great interest, one from his daughter Margreat dated November 19, 1936 in which she discussed what it was like to be a daughter of a renowned man and what it was like to feel stagnant in growth as a mother. Another is a letter from student J.K Herring who owed Kilpatrick money that was loaned to him. He expressed his desire to repay him and was trying to set up a date to fully repay him. Kilpatrick wrote on the bottom of the letter that he often loaned his students money for hardship but unfortunately this student passed away before being able to repay him.

The Heresy Trial (1924)

One of the most well-known controversies in Baptist history at Mercer University may be The Heresy Trial of Dr. Henry Fox. Henry Fox was a professor in the Biology Department from 1918 to 1924. During his time at Mercer, Fox faced allegations of teaching the theory of evolution in his curriculum. The GBC considered evolution to be a taboo subject and subsequently disapproved of institutions teaching it. Prior to this controversy, Fox was a beloved professor. He was occasionally called “Mable,” a nickname deriving from primary school days.¹⁵ Fox’s extensive repertoire of education included his B.S. (1899) and M.A. (1903) from the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁶ See the image below for his educational background.



The World’s Christian Fundamentals Association developed during the fundamentalist movement and became involved in the Fox controversy. President Jasper C. Massee learned of the rumors about Fox teaching the theory of evolution at Mercer University. On October 22, 1923 Massee wrote a letter to Hugh M. Willet, an agent of the Alumn Association at Mercer. Massee wrote his concerns that faculty may be in violation of “false teachings” - assembly in response to a request of donation by the Alumn Association. He stated:

I am writing, however, before pledging myself, to make a frank inquiry. It is reported that the present Mercer faculty is devoted to the evolutionary theory and that evolution is freely taught at Mercer. With profound convictions that both Christian and evolutionary premise cannot be maintained and that the teaching of evolution in our schools is subversive to our Christian faith, I have been much distressed by this report and would be very glad to have you tell me definitely whether it is true or false.¹⁸

¹⁵ F.R. Nalls Jr., “Dr. Fox Nicknamed ‘Mabel’ by Fellow Students,” Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Feb. 3, 1922, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/2047>.

¹⁶ [Henry Fox] Biographical File. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA. <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/13543>

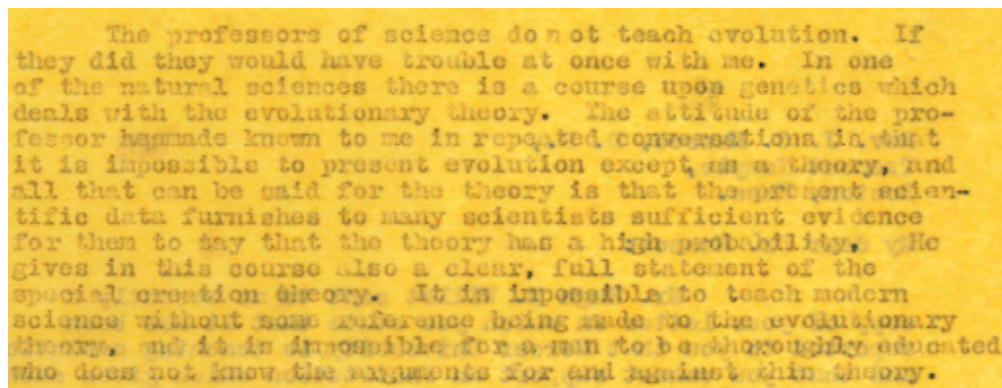
¹⁷ [Henry Fox] Biographical File. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA. <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/13558>

¹⁸ J.C. Massee to Rufus Weaver, October 22, 1923, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 5, Folder 244, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

Willet forwarded Massee's inquiry to Mercer president Rufus Weaver.¹⁹ As a significant donor to the university, it can be speculated that President Weaver felt a level of responsibility to ease Massee's concerns.²⁰ Weaver assured Massee that evolution was not being taught by faculty but referenced a "professor," likely Dr. Fox, that taught both theories to establish both perspectives in the context of the science of genetics. He supported this decision in his statement:

"The professors of science do not teach evolution. If they did they would have trouble at once with me. In one of the natural sciences there is a course upon genetics which deals with evolutionary theory. The attitude of the professor he made known to me in repeated conversations is that it is impossible to present evolution except as a theory, and in all that can be said for this theory is that he presents scientific data furnished to many scientists sufficient evidence for them to say that the theory has high probability. He gives in this course also a clear, full statement of the special creation theory. It is impossible to teach modern science without some reference being made to the evolutionary theory, and it is impossible for a man to be thoroughly educated who does not know the arguments for and against this theory."

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The professors of science do not teach evolution. If they did they would have trouble at once with me. In one of the natural sciences there is a course upon genetics which deals with the evolutionary theory. The attitude of the professor he made known to me in repeated conversations is that it is impossible to present evolution except as a theory, and all that can be said for the theory is that the present scientific data furnishes to many scientists sufficient evidence for them to say that the theory has a high probability. He gives in this course also a clear, full statement of the special creation theory. It is impossible to teach modern science without some reference being made to the evolutionary theory, and it is impossible for a man to be thoroughly educated who does not know the arguments for and against this theory.

President Weaver further described the university's booming enrollment of "ministerial students" and the services being presented on campus to celebrate "Jesus Christ as the son of God and Savior of all men." He may have been accustomed to finding a middle ground between the fundamentalist beliefs and the concern of academic freedom. Weaver noted in some of his letters that he did not support fundamentalism and found it to be "narrow minded."²² Regardless, Weaver's response pleased Massee as he made a promise to donate to the university. Massee stated that as a Fundamentalist Christian in the North there had been recent pressure and easy suspicions being passed on schools of teaching evolutionary theory. This had been a developing fear within the GBC as several individuals

¹⁹ Hugh M. Willet to Rufus Weaver, October 25, 1923, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 5, Folder 244, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

²⁰ Rufus Weaver to J.C. Massee, November 13, 1923, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 5, Folder 244, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

²¹ Rufus Weaver to Edward T. Mathews, January, 19, 1927, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 4, Folder 244, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

²² Rufus Weaver, "The Baptist Opportunity in A Scientific Age" (February 5, 1932), 2, Rufus Washington Weaver Papers, Box 11, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

sought to delay programs teaching premillennialist beliefs—such as a belief that Jesus Christ will return to earth after a seven day period of severe tribulation and will rule on earth for a millennium creating a period of peace and growth. This is in contrast to “amillennialism” and “postmillennialism.” Amillennialist believe that the reference to the ruling of a millennium is to not to be taken literally in the Book of Revelations, while postmillennialist believe Jesus Christ will rule for a millennium before Earth suffers a tribulation.²³

A year after the correspondence between President Weaver and Rev. Massee, Dr. Fox’s teachings of evolutionary theory continued to spread. In April 1924, the Mercer Board of Trustees assigned Dr. William Owen and Rev. W.A. Hogan to investigate Fox. They developed a committee that interviewed him on his orthodoxy. Weaver was surprised to hear Fox’s beliefs strayed from that of the Southern Baptists ideology.²⁴ Owen and Hogan’s made their report to the committee on June 5, 1924.

To the Administration Committee of the
Executive Committee of the
Georgia Baptist Convention.

Brethren:

On June 5, 1924, a Committee appointed by the Board of Trustees of Mercer University met with Dr. Henry Fox, Professor of Biology in said institution, for the purpose of questioning him regarding his religious views. This interview was held during the closing session of the Board of Trustees, and I as the President of the institution was therefore unable to be present. Meeting the members of the Committee after this interview, I was informed that the views held by Dr. Fox had greatly surprised and even astonished the members of the Committee, because they differed so widely and so vitally from the views held by Baptists generally. I was even more astounded, since I had assumed that on the basal conceptions of christian faith Dr. Fox's position was that of a devoted Baptist. In church attendance he has been perhaps more regular than any other member of our faculty; his contributions have been generous; his conduct above reproach, and his christian character, so far as one could observe it in daily contact on the campus, was most admirable. The Committee reported to the Board

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We grant to Dr. Fox, of course, a perfect right to liberty of opinion in the matter of his religious beliefs, but we do not think he has either the legal or the moral right to hold to the beliefs he claims and at the same time teach in Mercer University. We, therefore, recommend to you first, that Dr. Fox be requested to resign his professorship in Mercer University at once. Second, if he declines to so resign, we recommend that you declare his place vacant and proceed to fill it with some suitable person. Third, we believe that primarily the responsibility for this trouble lies with Dr. Fox. He knew when he entered the University how utterly his beliefs were at variance with those of the Georgia Baptists who were employing him. If he had been as frank in disclosing them then as he is now, the trouble would not have arisen, as he could not have been elected to the position he now holds. Nevertheless, we do not believe there was the slightest intention on his part to conceal anything or to be unfair in any way to the University; therefore, we recommend that you be as generous as possible with him in whatever financial compensation you make him for the loss of his position.

Weaver forwarded the committee’s decision and his own thoughts on his case. He opened, “My Dear Dr. Fox: Mercer University is controlled by a Board of Trustee elected by the Georgia Baptist Convention.”²⁶ Weaver did not agree with the decision and believed the committee’s decision had more to do with Fox’s religious beliefs than his teachings of the theory of evolution. Although President Weaver did not agree with the GBC, action had to be taken. The committee decision sent to Fox admitted that “Dr. Fox, of course, has a perfect right to liberty of opinion in the matter of his religious beliefs, but we do not think he has either the legal or

the moral right to hold to the beliefs he claims and at the same time teach in Mercer University.” The committee thus violated in some sense the right to freedom of religion.

²³ David K. Hebert, “The Need for Teaching the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ in the Twenty-First Century, Especially As We See the Day of His Parousia Approaching,” D.Th. thesis, (University of South Africa, 2009), 34-36

²⁴ Ashley Stephens, “Fundamentalism and the Fight for Academic Freedom: The Dismissal of Dr. Henry Fox from Mercer University in 1924,” Mercer University Research, Scholarship, and Archives, 2020, 4-5, <https://hdl.handle.net/10898/12146>; Henry Fox, “Dr. Henry Fox's Religious Views Interview,” June 5, 1924, Rufus Washington Weaver Papers, 1923-1926., Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

²⁵ Rufus Weaver to Executive Committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention, October 8, 1924, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

²⁶ Rufus Weaver to Henry Fox, October 11, 1924, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

The Board of Trustees advised President Weaver to have Dr. Fox resign, find a suitable replacement, and give Fox his remaining salary as he saw most appropriate. Weaver and Fox corresponded over the course of a few letters, and Fox openly declined to resign. He felt since President Weaver had failed to demand his resignation, he did not have to abide by the requests of the committee until Weaver did so.²⁷ Weaver took his denial as resistance and fired Fox on October 20, 1924 and enclosed the remainder of his owed salary of \$2,134.00.²⁸

Many of Fox's previous employers, Mercer students, and locals judged Fox for the controversy surrounding his departure even though he had been forced to resign. Mercer students were not pleased with this decision and within Fox's archived material we found letters of grief and solidarity with him from previous students. The Cluster, the student newspaper, expressed that academic freedom may be under threat with trials such as Dr. Fox's.²⁹

Reverend Hugh Wallace interviewed Fox on January 12, 1924 at the Macon City Auditorium.³⁰ Wallace asked many questions regarding Fox's specific religious beliefs. Fox however evaded most questions and told Wallace to contact President Weaver on his questions regarding his beliefs. Fox explicitly stated they had no right to ask him such questions and clarified that he was a "member of the church" and a Baptist. He defended himself that he never expressed his personal views on religion to his students.

MERCER UNIVERSITY
MACON, GEORGIA

October 16, 1924.

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY
HENRY FOX

Dr. Rufus W. Weaver, President,
Mercer University,
Macon, Georgia.

My dear Dr. Weaver:

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of October 11 in which you forward the resolutions of the Administration Committee of the Executive Committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention and the resolutions of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of Mercer University. I note that the resolutions of the latter body request you to demand my resignation and to provide a successor for myself and that I be asked to cease giving instruction as soon as my place is supplied by the college.

As your letter does not contain any demand for my resignation I await your further action in this regard.

Very truly yours,
Henry Fox

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my questions:

Answer: "I said, you have no right to ask me such questions, Submit your questions to Dr. Weaver. He will speak for the institution." Whereupon Mr. Wallace made a statement to the effect that "in due season these and other questions concerning what we believe as Baptists, about certain Bible fundamentals, will be submitted to Dr. Weaver".

²⁷ Henry Fox, to Rufus Weaver, October 16, 1924, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

²⁸ Rufus Weaver to Henry Fox, October 20, 1924, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

²⁹ "Dr. Fox Expected to Give Answer To-Day," Mercer Cluster, Oct. 17, 1924, <http://libraries.mercer.edu/ursa/handle/10898/2746>.

³⁰ Henry Fox v. Rev. Hugh Wallace, January 12, 1924, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

(Then, after another pause, Mr. Wallace said: "Well, there is just this to it: you (addressing Dr. Fox) have a perfect right to believe and teach what you please---the same as all of us have---but you haven't the right to draw your salary from a denomination whose historic principle you do not hold to be true. And, as sure as you are living, if you do not get out of Mercer University, you will 'Kill the goose that laid the golden egg'; you will see that the great majority of the real BAPTISTS of Georgia will refuse to longer support the institution. And, if Dr. Weaver endorses your views, and if he does not get out also, then you will see that Mercer University will go on the rocks of destruction, because the true BAPTISTS of this State will not support any institution that keeps on its faculty a man who does not believe the fundamental truths of the Bible. And, you watch it: as soon as the Baptist 75 million campaign is over, you will see that the Baptist Churches of this State will cut off and starve out any institution that allows or fosters infidelity. There are three forms of protest: there is the spoken protest; there is the written protest; and there is the SILENT protest. The Baptists of this State will simply close up their pocket-books like a clam, and starve to death any school that is false to the historic principles of BAPTISTS---AND I BELIEVE THERE ARE NINE HUNDRED OTHER BAPTIST PREACHERS IN GEORGIA WHO FEEL JUST AS I DO ABOUT IT".

Wallace asked many erratic questions about the fundamental beliefs of the Baptist Denomination and demanded answers from Fox. Students in the audience vouched for Fox as the interview drew to a close. Below is the final transcribed statement from Wallace in which he scolded Fox. Weaver contended that Fox had no right to teach at Mercer University if he did not hold fundamental values to be true. He referenced the "Baptist 75 Million Campaign," which was raised by the Southern Baptist Convention to "evangelize" the nation for Baptists through supporting Baptist universities across the nation.³¹ Weaver concluded that "The Baptists of the State" would close their pocketbooks and no longer donate to Mercer—effectively forcing the University to close its doors.

Ultimately, Mercer University had to make a difficult decision between accepting Fox's beliefs and facing financial ruin. The trustees of the University decided to remain a Baptist institution and terminate Fox's employment. Mercer University was able to successfully make the transition and remain a Baptist institution. Dr. Henry Fox went on to leave the Baptist denomination in 1932 and joined the "Society of Friends", a denomination of Quakers.³² Dr. Fox sought employment in "The Japanese Beetle Laboratory". He was hired and began working in the laboratory. He soon developed a successful theory to control the invasive beetle populations. In 1935 he retired and began working through the Bureau of Entomology. He was a part-time professor of biology at New York University until 1943. Sometime in the mid to late 1940s Dr. Henry, alongside his wife, joined Ocean View's Calvary Baptist Church, where he wrote for the church's newspaper and was a chair member on their board of trustees. He died at the age of sixty seven in 1951 and was renowned as a "nationally known biologist" and remembered for "his insistence on freedom of teaching".

³¹ Ashley Stephens, "Fundamentalism and the Fight for Academic Freedom: The Dismissal of Dr. Henry Fox from Mercer University in 1924," Mercer University Research, Scholarship, and Archives, 2020, 5, <https://hdl.handle.net/10898/12146>.

³² Lester Stephens, "The Biologist Henry Fox, Mercer University, and the Clash with Fundamentalists over Evolution and Religious Doctrine, 1924-1927," The Georgia Historical Quarterly 107 (Spring 2023). 33-34, <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/13543>.

The Academic Freedom of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)³³

The Academic Freedom of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was founded in 1915 to shape higher education goals and standards to protect the quality of education and academic freedom across the nation. They have had conferences that support specific chapters on “state-level issues.” Their Mission Statement as of 2024 states:

The mission of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is to advance academic freedom and shared governance; to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education; to promote the economic security of faculty, academic professionals, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and all those engaged in teaching and research in higher education; to help the higher education community organize to make our goals a reality; and to ensure higher education’s contribution to the common good.³⁴

On May 16th, 1925 the AAUP committee at John Hopkins University wrote to President Weaver informing him of their investigation. The chairman assigned to the special committee for this investigation was Edward B. Mathews. Mathews informed in his letter,

The circumstances of the case, so far as I know them, suggest that it presents a problem of vital interest not only to those interested in academic freedom but equally to the denominational colleges, particularly of those of the South. The committee in approaching this problem wishes to view with judicial fairness the various views and interests involved. It will seek full and frank statements of the positions of conflicting interests. To that I am writing you to see if you...would be willing to arrange a conference at which we may hear the side of question represented by you and the trustee of Mercer.³⁵

Mathews received no response from President Weaver. He wrote again on May 29, 1925 as he assumed Weaver did not receive the initial letter.³⁶ President Weaver responded the day he received Mathews’s second letter. Notably, as Weaver attempted to schedule a time to meet Mathews he stated that this case caused him personal strife due to the ruthlessness of the fundamentalist hold on the institution—therefore impacting academic freedom.³⁷ Weaver also defended Dr. Fox further.

³³ Rufus Weaver to Edward B. Matthews, May 29, 1925, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

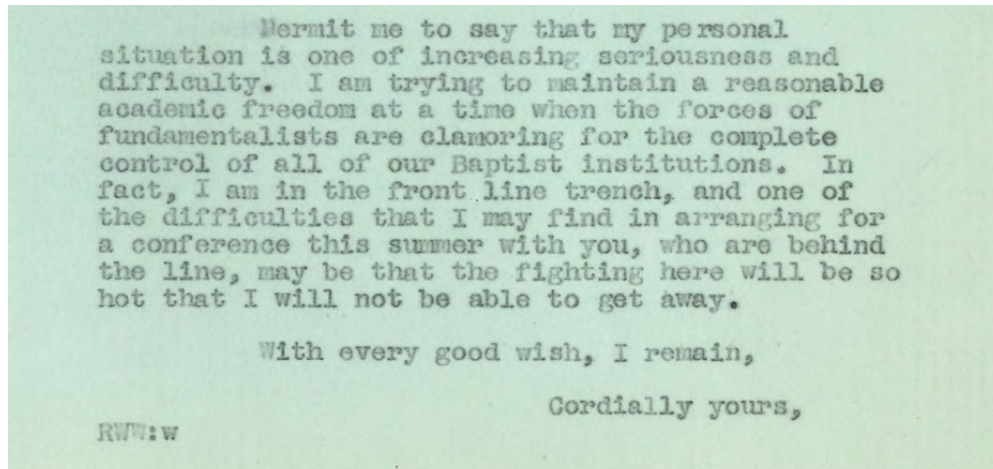
³⁴ “About the AAUP,” The American Association of University Professors, Dec. 11, 2020, <https://www.aaup.org/about-aaup>.

³⁵ Edward B. Matthews to Rufus Weaver, May 16, 1925, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

³⁶ Edward B. Matthews to Rufus Weaver, May 29, 1925, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

³⁷ Edward B. Matthews to Rufus Weaver, May 29, 1925, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

There has not been a published or archived conclusion to the investigation of Mathews but in the final letter in Weaver's files there was concern for the future of academic freedom when under the supervision of fundamentalists within the Southern Baptist Convention and by extension the Georgia Baptist Convention. If the GBC and Mercer University were to hire faculty for their intellectual abilities, Weaver wrote, then they should not restrict their professors to their beliefs, whether extensive or minimal in commitment—a fact that “Baptists of the South must face.”³⁸



Permit me to say that my personal situation is one of increasing seriousness and difficulty. I am trying to maintain a reasonable academic freedom at a time when the forces of fundamentalists are clamoring for the complete control of all of our Baptist institutions. In fact, I am in the front line trench, and one of the difficulties that I may find in arranging for a conference this summer with you, who are behind the line, may be that the fighting here will be so hot that I will not be able to get away.

With every good wish, I remain,

Cordially yours,

RWV:w

Fox's resignation is the earliest found example of a violation of academic freedom at Mercer University inflicted by the GBC. This appears to be an early trend of fundamentalist beliefs from the GBC and Board of Trustees conflicting with those of faculty of Mercer University. The accusations against Fox focused on his teaching of the theory of evolution, and upon further investigation the committee was not content with his individual beliefs according to how he practiced his faith. As seen with Kilpatrick and Fox, the 1920s began the process of taking issue with what can and should be taught in Baptist Institutions and turning it into a dissection of the personal beliefs of the faculty involved in teaching, leading to their resignation or removal. The line between academic freedom and the freedom of religion is a point of contention at this time—a trend that continued at Mercer into 2005.

³⁸ Rufus Weaver to Edward B. Matthews, September 23, 1925, Rufus Washington Weaver Collection, Box 1, Folder 41b, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

The “Unholy Thirteen”

On March 31, 1939, The Mercer Cluster published an issue titled “Students Jeer Heresy Trial.” Thirteen students made accusations against five professors of committing heresy through “un-christian teachings.”³⁹ Peers on campus disapproved of the accusations. Many students felt this was a display of “bigotry.” The students who made the accusations became known as the “Unholy Thirteen.” If the case of Dr. Fox fifteen years earlier had set precedent, then it could be assumed that the Board of Trustees of Mercer would have had the five professors resign from their positions. This, however, was not the outcome. All five of the teachers faced no consequences and had the favor of the committee charged with the investigation.

The differences of the outcomes for Dr. Fox and the case of the “Unholy Thirteen” shines a light on the progress made within a decade at Mercer and within the GBC regarding academic freedom and freedom of religion. Does the issue of academic freedom versus the issue of religious expression ever fully heal itself at the same rate by the time of the severance between the University and the GBC? This is a fundamental question to keep in mind as we examine the timeline of their relationship.

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CHARGES MADE AGAINST FIVE TEACHERS

Presentation of all testimony in the hearing of charges lodged against certain faculty members was completed last night at 9 p. m. after 10 hours of steady grilling of witnesses and the defendants.

Among the students serving as witnesses were J. B. Pickren, Billy Fitzpatrick, Alvin Hirsch, Earl Lewis, Tom Heaton, and James Alken.

A special committee appointed to decide the validity of the multitudinous charges will go into closed session this morning and is expected to render a verdict some time today. Members of the committee are F. R. Martin, Macon; J. C. Eaton, Macon; T. Hoyt Davis, Vienna; E. A. Kilgore, Baxley; O. M. Selgler, Canton, and T. F. Calhoun, of Thomasville.

Behind the closed doors of stuffy Roberts Chapel, Dr. John F. Freeman yesterday defended himself on charges of “un-Christian teaching” before an executive committee of the Board of Trustees. These charges were brought against him by thirteen ministerial students, who presented sworn affidavits quoting Dr. Freeman’s class dis-

³⁹ “Students Jeer Heresy Trial,” Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Mar. 31, 1939, <http://libraries.mercer.edu/ursa/handle/10898/2168>.

The Lavender Scare

Little is known about LGBT+ history in Macon or Mercer between the decades of 1920 and 1970. The following chapters are of what was located and discovered from online resources and donation.

Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, there was a wave of fear known as the “Lavender Scare.” The name derives from the social fear of the “Red Scare,” which became undeniably intertwined with the Lavender Scare, associating LGBT+ identities with communism. This fear derived from an increased awareness of LGBT+ people within the U.S. population. Many LGBT+ identifying individuals were fired, arrested and shamed for their sexualities and gender expression.¹ The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in its first edition in 1952 deemed homosexuality a “sexual deviance” and attributed it to mental illness. This kind of thinking continued until the diagnosis was removed in 1973.² This time in history is extremely frustrating for many to look back upon. The dismissal and villainization of the community and led to many suffering and dying as a result of anti-LGBT laws, policies, and social expectations.

Organizations such as the Daughters of Bilitis rose at this time to offer refuge to fellow lesbian identifying people.³ They were one of the first known LGB political organizations founded in San Francisco in 1955. The goals of the group during the 1950s to 1970s was to educate their members on lesbian history and help them come to know themselves. They held symposiums for open discussion on LGBT topics and by extension fighting against social taboos and prejudices. They additionally dedicated themselves to studying the law in hopes of influencing change to stop the persecution of LGBT+ populations in state and federal law.

The Mattachine Society was another secret organization founded in Los Angeles in 1950. The society was founded by Communist Harry Hay; left-aligned progressives Bob Hull, Chuck Rowland, Dale Jennings, Konrad Stevens, and James Gruber; and Jewish refugee Rudi Gernreich. In 1955, they published an annual magazine called The Mattachine Review.⁴ They were also known for working with Evelyn Hooker, a well-known psychologist, to change the narratives and scientific approach to studying the community within the field of psychology.⁵ Their work can be attributed to the removal of homosexuality as a mental illness from the DSM.

¹ Judith Adkins, “‘These People Are Frightened to Death’: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare,” Prologue, Summer 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html>.

² Sara E. McHenry, “‘Gay is Good’: History of Homosexuality in the DSM and Modern Psychiatry,” American Journal of Psychiatry Residents’ Journal 18, no. 1 (Sept. 2022): 4.

³ “Government Persecution of the LGBTQ Community is Widespread,” Pride & Progress, LGBTQ+ Victory Institute, accessed date, <https://www.prideandprogress.org/years/1950s>.

⁴ “The Mattachine Society,” Library of Congress, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/before-stonewall/mattachine>.

⁵ Jess McHugh, “What Was it Like to Be an LGBTQ Activist Before Stonewall?” Time, June 25, 2019, <https://time.com/longform/mattachine-society/>.

Organizations like the Daughters of Bilitis and The Mattachine Society took part in the “homophile movement” to fight for the rights of LGBT+ communities in the mid-twentieth century. Post-WWII underground bar scenes became well established within the LGBT+ community across the nation, especially in large cities such as New York, Atlanta, and New Orleans. Towards the end of the decade on June 29, 1969 the The Stonewall Uprising occurred.⁶ In Greenwich Village in New York City, the Stonewall Inn was a gay bar that hosted many patrons and drag shows for years. New York City police raided the bar, inciting an uprising from those within the bar and the local LGBT+ community. Police raids commonly occurred at the time as bars served as the only public venues where the community could gather, and the raids were often violent with many LGBT+ identifying people being injured, hospitalized, and arrested under anti-LGBT laws, such as the “cross-dressing” laws.⁷ Police dragged individuals from the Stonewall Inn and the rebellion from the event spilled into the street and neighboring Christopher Park. The uprising lasted for six consecutive days. The Stonewall Uprising is considered the catalyst for the LGBT+ rights movement.

⁶ “Stonewall Riots,” History, last modified June 20, 2024, <https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/the-stonewall-riots>.

⁷ “1969: The Stonewall Uprising – Bar Raids & Police Brutality,” Library of Congress, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/stonewall-era#s-lib-ctab-24103782-1>.

Ann's Tic Toc Room

Ann Grace Fellows Howard was the owner of a Macon bar and restaurant known as Ann's Tic Toc Room. It was located at 408 Martin Luther King Boulevard in Macon, Georgia. Miss Ann opened the bar in 1951 shortly after marrying her husband Johnny Howard. Singers Little Richard, Otis Redding, and James Brown performed at the bar before they rose to fame. Little Richard specifically credited his start as a well-known musician in the South to the generosity of Miss Ann who had him perform at her bar when he was a teenager. She hired him to work in the kitchen and to sing to the patrons—it's reported that she also housed Little Richard during this time. "He would come after (the bus station) closed down to work for me," Miss Ann told *The Telegraph* in a 1990 interview. "He would work in the kitchen, and then he would go on stage and play for 45 minutes or an hour and then go back in the kitchen." Little Richard worked six nights a week according to his then manager, Percy Welch, and performed "Tutti Frutti."⁸



In 1957, Little Richard dedicated his song "Miss Ann" to her and his song "Long Tall Sally" to her sister Sallie Cox. Both songs make reference to the time he spent at the bar. After her death, Little Richard was interviewed over the phone and described her as "a good lady." He stated, "When racism was real strong down there, she was always real nice. Her husband was a good man, and she was a good woman who opened the door for a lot of black people." The bar was well-known for being an inclusive location for many to come together and have a good time.⁹



The invitation to all included those from the LGBT+ community. Ann's Tic Toc Room was Macon's first openly gay bar. A photograph donated by Demarcus Beckham who received the image from Jamie Waetherord, co-owner of the Rock Hard Candy Tours, shows a group of drag queens posing

⁸ "Ann Grace Fellows Howard," Find a Grave, Jan. 10, 2010, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/46787589/ann-grace-howard>.

⁹ "Ann Grace Fellows Howard," Find a Grave, Jan. 10, 2010, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/46787589/ann-grace-howard>.

when performing at the bar. The date of the photograph is unknown but can be assumed to be from the 1950s to 1960s. In 1975, the bar closed due to Miss Ann's declining health and her subsequent retirement. The piano from her bar is displayed in the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in Macon, and The Charles Cox Family Trust raised a historical marker of the bar at 382 Cherry St. Macon, GA 31201.¹⁰

Information regarding Ann's Tic Toc Room has been very limited. This is an instance of when LGBT+ history has not been documented or archived as of the publication of this work. If you or someone you know has any information regarding this period of LGBT+ history in Macon, please contribute materials to your local archive! Please reference page 174 to learn how to archive at home and where you can donate archival material today. Thank you.

- My Name Matters Campaign

¹⁰ "Tic Toc: Historic Macon Music Registry," Historical Marker Database, last modified Aug. 12, 2022, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=186756>.

Macon Nightlife: Is it Gone?

We at the My Name Matters Campaign acknowledge the lack of information regarding the drag scene in Macon. We invite any and all willing to provide this history and tell their stories to reach out to us to expand this book with more accurate history and future works. Contact us at MyNameMattersCampaign@gmail.com



Ravion Starr Alexandria St. James has been performing live drag shows in Macon since 1996. She often shared the stage with the late Macon trailblazer and professional female impersonator Tangerine Summers. There have been numerous gay bars in downtown Macon but it seems that many have not been able to stay open—why is this? We Three on Cotton Avenue, The Red Wood, Topaz and The Pegasus Lounge were all prominent gay clubs and bars that have since closed. Ravion was interviewed by Myracle Lewis of The Telegraph in May 2024.¹² The last straw according to Ravion was the closing of The Mill in 2017. There have been lounges and bars such as Flavorz Coffee and Hookah

Lounge, but none seem to stay open for very long. The gay nightlife in Macon has dwindled, and Ravion said she doesn't think it will be revived, and this may be due to the fact that some bars aren't genuine or authentic to the gay community.

From our research and involvement with Macon nightlife, there have been bars in Macon that host drag show events such as Capitol Theatre Macon, The Society Garden, Reboot Retrocade & Bar, and many more. However, there is not a designated gay bar or queer scene accessible to the LGBTQ+ community in Macon. The local community has considered 425 Cherry St. Macon, GA 31201, the previous home of Club Synergy and The Mill in the 2000s,¹³ a historic building but the city of Macon has not given the building official historic status.¹⁴ Today JBA, a music venue and bar, stands at 425 Cherry Street. They are well-known for hosting iconic drag house “The Tribe Macon,” which consists of drag queens Christina Leon (Director), Yutoya A. Leon, Akasha Giselle Vidale, and Pynk.¹⁵ They have been heavily involved in bringing drag events to Macon for years alongside with Macon Pride. Notably, they have invited Rupaul Drag Race Stars LaLa Ri, Latrice Royal, and All Stars season nine winner Angeria Paris VanMicheals.

You can see their future events on their website: <https://www.thetribemacon.com/blank-page>

¹¹ “The Real Diva of Macon: Ravion Starr & Alexandria St. James,” Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/people/The-Real-Diva-of-Macon-Ravion-Starr-Alexandria-St-James/100063662465783/>.

¹² Myracle Lewis, “Macon LGBTQ Community Works to Keep Culture Alive, Even Without Nightlife ‘That Belongs to Us,’” Telegraph (Macon, GA), last modified June 1, 2024, <https://www.macon.com/news/local/article288892384.html>.

¹³ Myracle Lewis, “Significant Building in Downtown Macon Has Had ‘Many Lives,’ Served the LGBTQ+ Community,” Telegraph (Macon, GA), June 13, 2024, <https://www.macon.com/news/business/article289215329.html>.

¹⁴ “Macon’s Historic Districts,” Historic Macon Foundation, accessed Oct. 4, 2024, <https://www.historicmacon.org/macons-historic-districts>.

¹⁵ “Meet the Tribe,” The Tribe Macon, accessed Sept. 20, 2023, <https://www.thetribemacon.com/blank-page>.

**Images from The Tribe Macon
Website**



“a good - a very good - college”

During the early 1970s, Mercer’s relationship with The Georgia Baptist Convention was under scrutiny by not only the GBC but also by contributing parties of churches, trustees, supporters, and more. Many called upon Mercer and the GBC to conduct a study into the university to determine what should be improved to encourage and maintain current reputation, funds, and religious support from the greater Baptist community.¹ The results of this study were used as indications of why Mercer University and the Convention should sever all ties, legally and financially. As a power-hold over the university, they wished to amend the language of their charter agreement to have GBC trustees elected over Mercer trustee nominations. As stated before, this had been a historically recurring contention between the two parties, where the university was threatened and investigated to encourage a severance for decades as seen with the case of Dr. Henry Fox.

Subsequently, the GBC conducted a study to determine what shall be worked on in regards to the structure and operations within the university. The study additionally examined the relationship between the GBC and Mercer. A special committee provided by the GBC and led by GBC appointed Trustee Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn of the First Baptist Church of Thomaston to conduct the report.³ The investigation began November 11, 1973 and the report, titled the “Cliburn Report,” was released to the committee in 1975. Once finalized, the report was published to the university and the GBC. The report provided a list of “problem areas,” and they were as follows:

1. Communication between the parties: *“Communication between the university and its Georgia Baptist constituency needs improvement.”*
2. Churches withholding support due to Mercer policies: *“There are some churches in our Georgia Fellowship which have, in recent years, withheld their Cooperative Program gifts because some of the policies and practices of Mercer University were offensive to them.”*
3. Baptist Education Emphasis: *“The emphasis upon Christian education programs and Baptist student work in particular needs strengthening.”*



¹ Georgia Baptist Convention, 1975, page 106. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

² “Running The University is Trustee Business” Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Oct. 10, 1975

³ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, “A Response to the Convention,” November 26, 1976 [Subject Folder]: “Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s” Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 10

4. Trustee Reliability: *“Trustee cognizance of their responsibility to the Convention as convention-elected trustees needs emphasis.”*

5. Student Religious Practice: *“Additional emphasis needs to be made with regard to the recruitment and training of ministerial students and others called to church related vocations.”*⁴

The recommendations provided to alleviate these “problem areas” were reliant on a 1942 report made by Dr. Sprite Dowell and submitted to the GBC. They quoted from his work that the Christian College is an *“agency of Christian education that in its set-up, facilities, courses of study, personnel, objectives, and atmosphere is motivated by and committed to the principles and the practices of Christianity as revealed and exemplified in Christ.”*⁵

Additional recommendations were based on the GBC’s five points of commitment to supporting a university that must be upheld to continue relations:

1. “FAITHFULNESS TO THE COMMISSION OF CHRIST REQUIRES INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION.”
2. “BAPTISTS SUPPORT COLLEGES IN AN EFFORT TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR YOUNG PEOPLE AND OTHERS OF LIFE SPIRIT AND PURPOSE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING WITH A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY , PERSPECTIVE, AND COMMITMENT.”
3. “BAPTISTS SUPPORT COLLEGES IN THE CONVICTION THAT CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDING ADEQUATE LEADERSHIP FOR THE CHURCHES AND DENOMINATIONS, AND ASSISTING IN THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF THE COMMUNITY, STATE AND NATIONAL LEADERS.”
4. “BAPTISTS SUPPORT COLLEGES IN THE CONVICTION THAT THEY ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE WELFARE OF THE STATE AND NATION IN THE OPERATION OF THESE INSTITUTIONS.”

⁴ Georgia Baptist Convention, 1975, page 107. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

⁵ Georgia Baptist Convention, 1975, page 108. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA. Georgia Baptist Convention Minutes, 1942 page 109

5. "GEORGIA BAPTISTS SUPPORT COLLEGES THROUGH THE STATE CONVENTION ORGANIZATION IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A BROAD BASIS OF SUPPORT, AND IN ORDER TO ENLIST THE LARGEST NUMBER OF CHURCHES AND INDIVIDUAL BAPTISTS POSSIBLE IN THE SUPPORT OF THESE INSTITUTIONS."⁶

Based upon these stipulations, Mercer University was given recommendations to not only address the five points of "problem areas" but to also report their improvements to the Chair of the Trustees with the committee during their next scheduled order of business. President Rufus C. Harris of the university responded to the report in great detail and mailed it to Trustee Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn. In his report, Harris stated that himself and the university were taking the review seriously and would give "thoughtful attention to the recommendations."⁷

Harris addressed the need for a more Christian atmosphere at the institution by managing hesitations among Mercerians to fully accept religion and its teachings without question. He acknowledged their anxiety to fully commit to the Baptist denomination and religion due to the unknowns about if religion or God is real. Harris stated, "A thoughtful student today, unlike those of earlier days, is more likely to ask his teacher or minister what he is staking his life on, rather than what he asserts, or even knows. The need for faith has always been great, but now that need is uniquely apparent."⁸ He falls back upon the teachings of Billington Sanders and his wisdom regarding how faith should not be shown but encouraged as a substance; faith should be felt by the senses not taught just through speech.⁹

⁶ Georgia Baptist Convention, 1975, Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA. Georgia Baptist Convention Minutes, 1942 page 120 -121

⁷ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 10

⁸ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 10

⁹ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, November 26, 1976 "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 11

Harris also addressed the most recent scandals of Mercer's student newspaper, which had recently put a spotlight on Mercer's authority over students and their "immoral publications."¹⁰ In 1975, the Georgia Baptist Convention was made aware of four issues published by The Mercer Cluster and accused the issues of continuing advertisements for alcoholic beverages and "immoral" movies. The reality of the content within those editions were found to be weekly movie showings on campus of several films. These were displayed in the October 3, 10, and 17 issues of the newspaper.¹¹ The following movies were promoted:

October 3 Issue: *Bananas* (1971);
Million Dollar Legs (1932)

October 10 Issue: *American Graffiti*
(1973); *A Night in Casablanca* (1946)

October 17 Issue: *Minnie and*
Moskowitz (1971)



Bananas and American Graffiti were arguably the most "immoral" movies shown since they portrayed more sexual and violent content.¹² As for the advertisement of alcoholic beverages, the September 17 issue contained a page that advertised local entertainment spots for students.¹³ Within their recommendations were a list of restaurants that not only served alcohol but also offered discounts for Mercer students. The descriptions of each restaurant listed if the establishment served alcohol and in what form—cocktails, wines, and more.

Due to these recent publications, Harris emphasized in his response to the Cliburn Report that the university in no way promoted pornography in any form. He explained that the movie industry itself can mislead audiences in regard to the content of their film through advertising, suggesting that this makes it hard for them to determine if the content is appropriate prior to viewing. Harris admitted that there is a "fine line between realistic portrayal of life and pornography."¹⁴

The Golden Dragon
Restaurant-1990 Riverside Dr.,
746-5595. Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2:30
p.m.; Dinner 5:00 to 10:00 Mon. -
Thurs.; 5:00 to 10:30 Fri.-Sat.
American and Chinese food;
specializes in Chinese (Peking,
Szechuan, Hunan, Canton); wine
and mixed drinks; accept C&S,
Master Charge, Bank Americard
(not out-of-town checks). CALL
RESTAURANT FOR DETAILS
OF MERCER DISCOUNT.

¹⁰ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s, Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 11

¹¹ "The SUAB Movies of the Week," Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Oct. 3, 1975, <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/3227>; "The SUAB Movies of the Week," Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Oct. 10, 1975, <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/3229>; "The SUAB Movies of the Week," Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Oct. 17, 1975, <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/3230>.

¹² "Bananas, Parents Guide," IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066808/parentalguide>; "American Graffiti, Parents Guide," IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069704/parentalguide>.

¹³ "What to Do at Mercer U," Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Sept. 17, 1975, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3227>.

¹⁴ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict

Harris returned to the issue at hand of student engagement with faith by describing their activeness in serving the community. The university restored the sanctuary of Stetson Chapel in the Tattnall building despite the original purpose of the chapel, as Dr. Louie Newton's admonition declared the chapel to be a meeting place for the church and not an entity of the church itself. Harris assured that the chapel would be a symbol of the faith of future, present, and past Mercerians. Along with the restoration, the Baptist Student Union had revived interest and faculty participation increased. Harris hired new faculty to facilitate Baptist student admissions to the university by reaching out to Baptist churches. Courses offered by the Christianity Department went under review for adequate content. These are the steps Harris described in detail to Cliburn and the committee.

Harris reassured and praised the committee, but he also cautioned them in their attempts to instate a Christian and faith-based atmosphere. His warning used the Book of Amos from the Bible as his support. "We must avoid the position of the man portrayed in the Book of Amos, who was running and met a lion. He turned the other way and met a bear. Fleeing into the house, he laid his hand on the wall only to be struck by a serpent," Harris wrote.¹⁵ Those who wish to curate a faith-based environment should not be working in response to fear and risk. If too much authority is imposed on students, faculty and institutions, then there will be a collision with academic freedom.¹⁶ Harris determined that the tradition of academic freedom must be respected or they will invite "destruction of the University." Students of Mercer and of Christian universities study with faith and with kindness in mind to create excellent educational experiences for all students. President Harris declared that Mercer's first priority is to be **"a good- a very good- college."**¹⁷

What Is The Cluster?

The Cluster is a student-run newspaper detailing Mercer University news and news from the surrounding area.²⁰ The Cluster first began in 1920 and continues today. While publication started exclusively on paper, articles also began being published online in 2011 and paper publication ended in 2022. Mercer's Tarver Library and the Digital Library of Georgia have every issue of The Cluster from 1920 to 1990 available online. The Mercer Archives in Tarver Library also houses printed versions of past articles. The Cluster's goals are to produce objective, accurate, inclusive, and informative articles for Mercer students and people in the Macon community and also to allow Mercer students the chance to advance their journalism skills and knowledge.

Dr. Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn was an alumnus of Mercer University who completed his undergraduate degree there in 1950.¹⁸ While at Mercer, he worked as a youth minister near campus at Tattnall Square Baptist Church. He eventually worked as a pastor at First Baptist Church of Thomaston from 1957 until 1981. Cliburn was also a trustee of Mercer University in Macon during this time and a trustee of Tift College (which eventually merged with Mercer in the 1980s) of Forsyth and the Baptist Village in Waycross.¹⁹ He served as vice president of the Georgia Baptist Convention and president of the Georgia Baptist Sunday School Convention. Cliburn also later served as the Assistant Executive Director-Treasurer of the GBC from 1981 to 1994.

¹⁵ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s", Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 11

¹⁶ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s", Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 14

¹⁷ Dr. Rufus C. Harris to Rev. Edwin L. Cliburn, "A Response to the Convention", November 26, 1975 [Subject Folder]: "Georgia Baptist Convention - Conflict - 1970s", Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA., pg 15

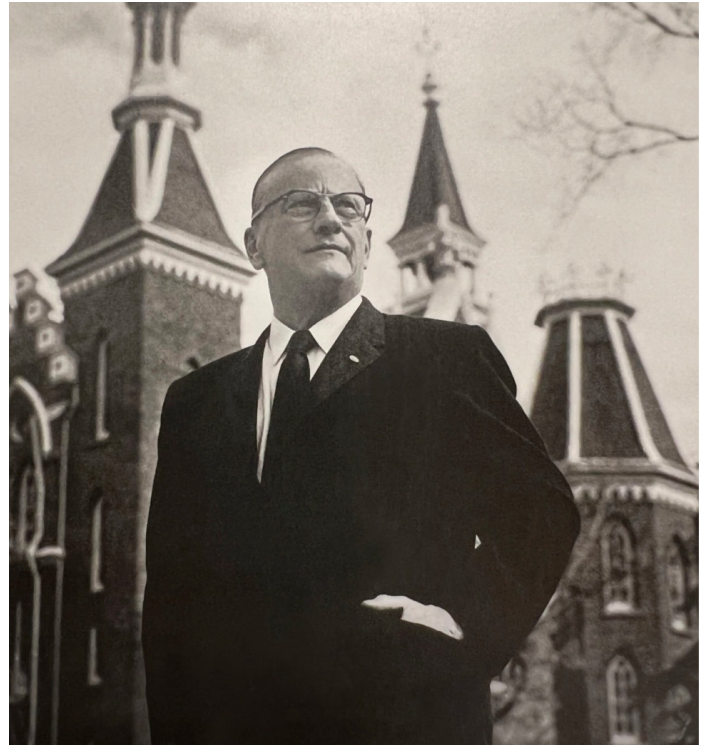
¹⁸ "J. Cliburn Obituary," Legacy Remembers, Sept. 4, 2015, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/legacyremembers/j-cliburn-obituary?id=10608772>.

¹⁹ "History of Mercer University," Mercer University, accessed July 10, 2024, <https://www.mercer.edu/about-mercer/history/>.

²⁰ "About Us," Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), n.d, <https://www.mercercluster.com/page/about>.

Rufus C. Harris (1897-1988)

Dr. Rufus C. Harris was the sixteenth president of Mercer University from 1960 to 1979.²¹ He was originally from Georgia (born in 1897) and graduated from Mercer's undergraduate program in 1917.²² After graduating, he married Mary Louise Walker and then served in the U.S. Army before attending Yale Law School.²³ Throughout the course of his life, Harris earned a total of fifteen honorary degrees. He returned to Mercer where he was dean and a professor at Mercer Law School from 1923 to 1927. After this, he became a dean at Tulane University's law school from 1927 to the beginning of his presidency there in 1937. While president at Tulane, he received the French Legion of Honor in 1953. In 1960, he ended his presidency at Tulane and became the president of Mercer University until 1979 when he retired. During his time as president at Mercer, he was recognized as an officer in the Most Excellence Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II in 1969.²⁴ In his retirement, he remained at Mercer as the Chancellor until his death in 1988. His commitment to Mercer led to him earning Mercer's Medal of Excellence.



Notable developments at Mercer during his presidency include:

- The building of Stetson Library
- The building of the Willet Science Center
- The beginnings of the development of the Mercer School of Medicine
- Mercer Law School transferred from the main undergraduate campus to Coleman Hill (1978)
- The merging of Atlanta Baptist College and Mercer University (1978)
- The integration of Mercer when Sam Oni was admitted to attend in 1963 (prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964)

²¹ Andrea Honaker, "Dr. Rufus C. Harris Was a Noble Higher Education Leader," Den, Oct. 27, 2022, <https://den.mercer.edu/dr-rufus-c-harris-was-a-noble-higher-education-leader-merc-er-legends/>.

²² "Rufus Carrollton Harris (1960-1979)," Mercer University Libraries, accessed date, <https://merc-er.libguides.com/mupresidents/Harris>.

²³ Andrea Honaker, "Dr. Rufus C. Harris Was a Noble Higher Education Leader," Den, Oct. 27, 2022, <https://den.mercer.edu/dr-rufus-c-harris-was-a-noble-higher-education-leader-merc-er-legends/>.

²⁴ "Rufus Carrollton Harris (1960-1979)," Mercer University Libraries, accessed date, <https://merc-er.libguides.com/mupresidents/Harris>.

His priorities as president included:

- Better faculty pay
- Improving conditions of classrooms, buildings, and facilities
- Increasing standards for admission to the university
- Making a name for Mercer as a Liberal Arts University with high standards for its students

Outside of Mercer, Harris also helped advocate for benefits for World War II soldiers by co-authoring the G.I. Bill.²⁵

²⁵ Andrea Honaker, "Dr. Rufus C. Harris Was a Noble Higher Education Leader," Den, Oct. 27, 2022, <https://den.mercer.edu/dr-rufus-c-harris-was-a-noble-higher-education-leader-mercere-legends/>.

LGBTQ+ Media Coverage in Macon

The following excerpts are from local newspapers in the late 1970's. We invite you to read the clippings and reflect on the media being portrayed in this era and how it affected the interpretation of queerness and the subsequent effects of religious judgment upon the community.

Sex Change May End His Identity Search ¹



Sex Change May End His Identity Search

By Melodie Palmer
Staff writer

Her daily giveaways are broad, blunt-ended fingers, a strong jawline and a low voice. Terry (not her real name) is a bit unusual at first. She says she's still more comfortable around those who didn't know her "before..." Before he became a she.

"I guess I've wanted to do this all along. I know now that I'm not crazy," she says, smiling. "This is what I've wanted to do... I feel satisfied. I'd do it all over again."

Wearing a beige, V-neck sweater and cream-colored slacks, 24-year-old Terry hesitantly talks about changing her sex. It's only recently that she is able to face what she considers the public's ignorance, fear and misunderstanding.

"I just want people to understand. Everybody's life's been touched by something different. It's like when I see somebody with a handicap. I think they still have a mind. It's not as though I'm gonna harm anyone."

Smoking cigarette after cigarette, Terry slowly explains her past. As known (also a fictitious name), he was always a little different. He knew he wasn't strictly following the rules society dictates for male youngsters, but he didn't understand why.

"I remember once, when I was little, I was playing with a girl who lived next door and we dressed up in women's dresses," Terry recalls. "My older brother was in the first grade at the time. When he came home after school, he and a bunch of his friends saw me sitting on the girl's front porch — dressed up. He was just furious. Then he ran home and told my mother."

HIS BROTHERS knew he wasn't like them, but never mentioned it. "They didn't know how to talk about it," Terry says. Her mother still hasn't fully acknowledged her as a woman.

"But she probably knew something would eventually happen," she adds. "My mother would give me a doll for Christmas when I was a kid. Then she would also give dolls to my brothers — to make it look all right, I guess. Honestly they didn't want to play with dolls so I ended up with all of them."

When Robert was 8, his divorced mother remarried. For the next five years the family moved around the Atlanta area. Then they settled in Macon.

"My stepfather was really into sports," she says. "He couldn't understand why the others (members of the family) liked things like Little League and I didn't... I played one year, but it was just... She struggled and lit up another cigarette."

Robert was popular in high school. His brothers were well-liked, which also placed him in the limelight.

"I probably dated more girls than my brothers. I don't know if it was to compensate or just because I hung around girls a lot. I didn't like guys very much when I was younger. I felt more comfortable with girls."

IN Tenth grade, he dated one girl secretly. The first year the two became intimate. Then, in the summer between the 10th and 11th grade, he became interested in a male friend of his brother.

The boys' relationship was a difficult one. The other boy's girlfriend was a friend of Robert's girlfriend and the couple would often double-date.

Their closeness resulted in jealousy from Robert's brother and girlfriend.

"I was upset in the girl, honey. I was she touched me, I'd argue. I didn't know what was happening and I didn't understand," she says. "It's been so long, I can't remember... I don't like to remember."

Family and friends were reluctant to face Robert's problem. He felt confused and ashamed. Nevertheless, the intimate relationship continued.

Eventually, his strongest support came from his steady girl — who became a plastic friend.

"She said 'I know what's happening,' but even then I didn't talk it over with her. I couldn't."

(See 30A, Page 20)

Psychiatrists Differ On Causes, Cures

By Melodie Palmer
Staff writer

If people think of what it would be like to be another sex, a psychiatrist once said. For most it's an idle daydream. But some are convinced nature has made a mistake — that they're trapped in a body that's the wrong sex.

Although this paradox is labeled transsexualism, psychiatrists more aptly call this **gender dysphoria**. The condition's cause isn't known, but there are two theories. One is transsexualism as the result of biological dysphoria. The other is transsexualism is the result of a disturbed family background.

Whatever the cause, the subject is often associated with transvestites and homosexuals. Neither term applies to a transsexual.

The etymology of these conditions (transsexualism, transvestitism) may suggest the survival of primitive life. Some life forms, such as earthworms, have ovaries and testes. According to reference books, our ancestors probably had both male and female sex glands. Only the female sex glands were functional in females, but they also had non-functional male glands. The reverse was true for males.

FURTHER EVIDENCE shows the human embryo contains glands that show no indication whether they are to be testes or ovaries. Two duct systems also exist, male and female. As the fetus develops, sex hormones are excreted to either trigger development of a girl or production of male hormones for a boy.

While the placenta excretes a large amount of female sex hormones, they are produced late in pregnancy. But if

(See PSYCHIATRIST, Page 18)

The recognition of Transgender or otherwise genderqueer individuals throughout the 70s and 80s often was not. This lack of recognition led to a lack of visibility and support for these individuals, which made it difficult for them to find acceptance in society. This lack of acceptance was often reflected in the media, with stories focusing on the individual's struggle to accept their identity - often this led to a common theme of sexual promiscuity and sex work as being LGBTQ+ identifying was considered by religious groups as a sexual deviance. In the side panel you see the discussion of queer identities being a 'mental illness' - they discuss the common experience of gender dysphoria while using outdated terms to describe transgender people.

¹ "Sex Change May End His Identity Search", November 2, 1980: 1a. Microfilm: 'Macon Telegraph 1980' 1. Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

Sex Change From Page 1E

Finally, Robert wrote his friend a note and left it in the locker they shared. After that, they drifted apart only to get back together again months later.

Robert moved to Atlanta and attended college. He saw his lover on weekends, and was able to handle the emotional aspect better. ("I became more worldly.")

In Atlanta, he felt freer, but unsatisfied.

"I wished I was happy with being gay, but I wasn't. I came back to Macon and lived with my mother. I wasn't interested in anything. I didn't realize how down I was.

"By this time my mother knew something was wrong. I think she found a letter I wrote to my boyfriend. Anyway, she wanted me to see a psychiatrist."

Robert felt he wasn't ready for professional counselling. Nothing interested him. After a few sessions, he and his counselor agreed to wait.

HE WAS SICK of school. The few relationships he had with other men didn't make him happy.

"I felt all they wanted was another man. I didn't want that. I wanted it to be straight."

Robert again sought counselling.

This time, his psychologist suggested the Gender Identity Clinic in Jacksonville, Fla. (The clinic, headed by Dr. Ira Duschoff, has since been closed down, according to one psychiatrist contacted. Duschoff has been doing follow-up studies of those counselled.) Robert stayed there four days, taking tests and talking with a panel of psychologists, psychiatrists and specialists.

"They didn't tell what I should do either way. I left knowing what was ahead of me."

Terry admits she chose hairdressing as a profession because she knew "I couldn't have done this (sexual change) anywhere else." Friends at one beauty salon where she worked offered advice and encouragement.

Soon Robert was on the road to becoming Terry. He began having facial hair removed by electrolysis and taking hormone treatments.

"At 22, I felt I wasn't doing much — there wasn't much of a physical change. I was taking my time with it (the treatments). But I was doing something."

NOW, HER FACE is smooth. Her shoulder-length hair is combed in waves. Her chest is no longer flat; her figure is softer, rounder. Her

makeup's skillfully applied and she's had her name legally changed.

She lives with a man and has a woman's daydreams ("I would love to be able to have children.")

In another year, she will have an operation that will make her structurally female.

There have been many adjustments. The first time she went to the ladies' room "was weird." Selecting clothes has been awkward. ("The first time I went, I made up an excuse like I was buying clothes for my girlfriend.")

Her clients' responses to her sex change have been mixed. Although first bothered by what the public would think of her, she accepts her fate.

"I take insults in one ear and out the other. People would call and ask me about my sex change. Some would be rude. Sometimes I'd get compliments."

She says a few of her male customers have shown an interest in her, but she's refused any advances.

Despite hardships, she's satisfied with her progress. She realizes the importance of making herself happy.

"They (panel of professionals at Gender Identity Clinic) said I would probably need to move; start over again. I think I eventually will."

Bisexual Masochists?³

Bisexuals Masochists?

Dear Ann Landers: May I respond to the letter from the bisexual woman whose husband left her? I have had some first-hand experience in this area.

Every bisexual woman I've known or heard of is interested in a male lover only as a cover for her lesbian relationship. Or, a man comes in handy if she wants to have a child.

I dated a bisexual woman who told me she ripped off her working-class husband for \$20,000 in four years. She stayed with him, she admitted, so he would put her through college. She also told me I shouldn't be jealous of other men because if she wasn't dating me, she would be looking for a woman lover, not a man.

Ann, if you will check the "personals" column of the papers that cater to homosexuals, you'll find that 99 percent of the bisexual females are either brain-damaged or masochists. — **Lucky Escapee in Cedar Falls, Iowa**

Dear C.F.: Obviously, you are basing your statement on the material you read in "homosexual papers." This does not reflect the viewpoint or lifestyle of all bisexuals. "Ninety-nine percent brain-damaged or masochists?!!!" I hardly think so. Perhaps your personal experience is clouding your vision.

Dear Ann Landers: A



Ann Landers

This column appears in the Georgia Living section of the Macon Telegraph daily, and in the Thursday Family Living Guide and the Sunday Home and Family section of the Macon Telegraph and News. Write to Ann Landers in care of the Macon Telegraph, P. O. Box 4142, Macon, Ga. 31208.

month ago I came home late, in a drunken stupor, and beat up on my wife. She took our 2-year-old daughter and went to stay with her folks, who live in northern Minnesota.

I have quit drinking and am receiving counseling from a minister. Also, I have begged my wife to come back so we can rebuild our lives. She refuses because her parents are encouraging her to stay away from me for six months to teach me a lesson.

I love my wife and want to work at better communication between us. Her hesitancy, combined with her parents' influence, is something I cannot understand. Can you help? — **Heartbroken But Hopeful in Fayetteville, N.C.**

Dear H. but H.: Probably not. First, I don't know what you mean by "beat up." Did you slap her around a little, or did you crack her jaw and rearrange her bridgework?

Second: Was this the first time — or have you punched her out on other occasions?

Third: It would help to know whether you are a habitual boozier — or were you celebrating something that night? In the absence of answers to these questions, my advice is stick with the minister, and if you have to sweat it out alone for six months, it might help you appreciate her more when she does come home.

Dear Ann Landers: I was so glad when I saw that letter in your column from the woman who had arthritis of the eyes. She said all her friends laughed at her and insisted there was no such disease. In fact, they thought she was nuts.

Well, I have had the same experience. Now that the distinguished ophthalmolo-

gist from Texas has backed her up, I feel ever so much better. — **Sincerely, E.G. Wilkes-Barre, Pa.**

Dear W.B.: Many people wrote to express their gratitude for that very same letter. And now to set the record straight: Arthritis is indeed an inflammation of the joints, but rheumatoid arthritis often is associated with inflammation of other tissues of the body. That same disease can cause inflammation in the eyes. It is called iritis. So, as the Texas doctor pointed out, you actually have iritis. If you use this term rather than arthritis, nobody will laugh.

CONFIDENTIAL TO What's Your Size-Up? I would say she did indeed divorce him for "religious reasons." The woman worshipped money and he didn't have enough to suit her.

Is alcoholism ruining your life? Know the danger signals and what to do. Read the booklet, "Alcoholism" — Hope and Help," by Ann Landers. Enclose 50 cents with your request and a long, stamped, self-addressed envelope to Ann Landers, P.O. Box 11905, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

E

² "Sex Change", November 2, 1980: 1e. Microfilm: 'Macon Telegraph 1980' 1. Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

³ "Bisexual Masochists?", March 13, 1980: 1a. Microfilm: 'Macon Telegraph 1980' 1. Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

Without a Church: Homosexuality Tormented Some People—And Then They Found Reconciliation ⁴

Without a Church Homosexuality Tormented Some People — And Then They Found Reconciliation

By Jane Oppy
Tennessee Staff Writer

"Either play it their way or get out. This is the Bible Belt."

That's Jamie Smith, a 27-year-old Bible-believing Baptist, talking about what it's like to be a homosexual Christian.

Most people in Jamie's fundamentalist faith say there's no such thing. The congregation he served as a teenager doesn't know to this day that Jamie, a successful young ordained preacher and popular youth leader, was gay. He can't tell them and preach, or even be accepted in the church. He is one of about 30 Middle Georgia homosexuals who want to worship the God many of them were comforted by and close to as children.

But the churches don't want them, they say. So they are talking about forming their own.

Where no one is turned away.
"Where preachers will preach the word of the Bible, and not their own interpretation," said Darlene, another gay person who feels, like Jamie, cut off from the church—but not from God.

WHAT HAPPENED TO Darlene and Jamie? They don't know. But they believe it's the way they were meant to be. They've come to terms with who they are—and they don't want to hide.

For 10 years, Jamie Smith preached the Bible and shook the hands of people who would have thrown him out if they had known what he was.

So today Smith (not his real name), instead of saving souls, healing, and bringing the gospel to the homeless and the lost, watches television church Sunday mornings.

The young man who once brought 300 people to the altar on the strength of his preaching when he was 17 finds no church that wants him today.

"I had God, and he had me," Jamie remembers sadly, looking at the well-worn Bible he preached from for 10 years. "And yet, I'm still gay."

Jamie doesn't know why. He remembers the day "when I was closer to God than I ever was in my life." He spent the night on his knees in the church, begging God to change him.

"IT WAS RIGHT at the beginning of my ministry. I spent 12 hours, begging, crying, praying.
Nothing happened."

A couple of weeks later, I just said one day, "God, I want you to show me, whether I'm wrong or whether I'm right." God's answer, as Jamie heard it, was "to go my way and be myself, for my reward is not on this earth."

Darlene's story is similar. So is Connie's, and Glenn's. We'll start with Darlene, 21, a Warner Robins store employee, and Irving with a young woman she calls her wife.

Raised a Christian Scientist, she learned to trust God to heal all ills. She was closest to her grandmother, a woman she describes as "close to God."

"My grandmother knew without my ever saying anything, three years ago," says Darlene. "Four years ago, I prayed to God to change me, to make me normal. My grandmother heard me, and she put her hand on my shoulder, and said, 'Darlene, I just want to tell you one thing...'"

"IF YOU NEVER remember me for anything but this, remember when you love someone, whether they be black or white, male or female, it's a very beautiful thing."
"And it's a part of God."

Today, Darlene and her lover occasionally are invited to church by friends or relatives. But friends and relatives

can't guarantee how the congregation will receive them.
Connie, a local gay leader (gays in the area suddenly found themselves with an organization when gay rights ordinance-fighter Anita Bryant's appearance here was announced), remembers how she was received in on Macon church.

"I was raised Baptist. I have two uncles who are Baptist preachers. But I chose the Methodist church," remembers Connie, a 30-year-old Maconite.

On her second or third Sunday at the church she knew she observed the middle-aged woman next to her in the pew staring at her conservative navy dress pants and white blouse.

FIRST SHE STARTED. Then she got up and moved.
How did she know Connie was gay? Glenn, who has had similar experiences, though more of them (Connie moved from one church to a second one, but Glenn attended a lot of six), answered the question.

"They don't actually know, they feel," says Glenn. "At when they feel someone is different, they get afraid."

Glenn, 27, describes the same agonizing experience: praying to God, pleading for the right to be normal.

That Jamie went through when he was a preacher.
Connie explains, "I would say there is not a gay person she says with conviction born of experience, 'that has not got on his knees and said, 'God, please help me.'"

For Glenn, it occurred as a young teen-ager.

HE WENT FROM church to church—Baptist, Holman Presbyterian, Evangelical Methodist—seeking answers.

"I would ask people how they felt about the homosexual. They would tell me how the church stands," he did give up. He tried to talk to pastors. "But they never let y talk."

He played the piano and sang for the church, re-made I commitment to God again and again. On the last church he felt he was at the end of his rope.

"I told it to the Lord. I said, 'God, either change me make me a different kind of person or help me grow a am.'"

Today, Glenn feels God gave him an answer.

"God didn't change me. He didn't take my ways from me. He has given me a destiny. And nothing short death is going to tell me I'm wrong."

HIS DESTINY? To organize a church for gay people.

"It will be sort of a life center. Where there will be no for different creeds."

His ideas are still in the talking stage. Jamie's ideas, somewhat different. He still wants to preach, as a Christian, which he says he knows he is.

Jamie, Darlene and the others are mixed in their view on just what kind of religious experiences they want. I the one thing they all want is acceptance.

Glenn is perhaps the closest to what might be called militant Homosexual. He is convinced that the lines of division between himself and the church are solid. He has reservations about the Bible itself.

"We all have to develop a personal relationship w God. I think the Bible is not flexible enough," says Glen

Jamie doesn't think that's the problem. He doesn't. I even talking about homosexuality. He takes his faith fr stories like Jesus and the crucified thieves.

"He didn't ask the thieves (on the cross) if they w baptized. He didn't ask them if they went to church, didn't ask them if they prayed."

"The thief on his right hand believed. The thief on the said, 'If thou be Jesus, spare us the pain.'"

"And he saved them both."

Will 'Be Who I am,' Homosexual Says ⁵

Will 'Be Who I Am,' Homosexual Says

(Continued From Page 1)

church turned into any gay movement."

Founder of a nationally organized movement of homosexual Episcopalians called "Integrity," Crew said the vestry member's action was "disappointing. I recognize that it is an inflammatory issue, but I can't wait around for them (vestry) to come to terms with my humanity. I have to be who I am."

The out-spoken homosexual, who is "married" to

another man, said he had no plans to bring up his sexual identity in the church. "They brought it up, but they wanted it to go unnoticed."

In their letter to Crew, who said he has sung in the church's choir, the vestry members said they found after checking the church registry that Crew was not an official member of St. Luke's parish.

"We welcome all Episcopalians to our church and other visitors, but do not believe that the business of this

parish should be dictated and/or directed by persons outside its official membership," the letter said.

But the English professor termed the membership issue based on a technicality.

According to the Rev. Sims, no visitor to the Episcopal Church is barred from attending services including those who happen to be homosexuals. "Yes indeed," (homosexuals are allowed to attend services), the Rev. Sims said, when asked about

the church's policy. He declined further comment.

The question of recognizing homosexuality in the Episcopal Church has surfaced many times in recent years. However, the church does not have an official policy on the issue, Crew said.

In a January 29 address to delegates of the North Georgia Episcopal conference, the Rev. Sims called indirectly for a study of homosexuality as it relates to the individuals of the church, Crew said.

⁴ "Without a Church: Homosexuality Tormented Some People—And Then They Found Reconciliation", December 9th, 1978, Microfilm: 'Macon Telegraph 1978' 1. Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

⁵ "Will 'Be Who I am,' Homosexual Says.", August 18th 1983. 1a. Microfilm: 'Macon Telegraph 1983' 1. Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington

Male Prostitute Likes His Job

From Page 1D

Lacy also has learned to pick customers. Lacy goes after the people who can easily be fooled and are not likely to fight.

"Mostly I date white guys," the 22-year-old black man says. "It's a lot easier to fool a white guy. If a white guy finds out what you are, it really doesn't matter. I mean he's going to pay his money anyway. Whereas a black guy, he may feel if you're a black homosexual and he's black, you should do it for free."

On an average, Lacy will fool enough white men to bring home between \$80 and \$100 each night.

IT IS ONLY after a night on the street that Blackman is ready to reach a sexual climax. He says when that happens, he goes to bed with another homosexual.

But Blackman says the real reward is knowing that he has fooled the customer. That is fun, Blackman says.

"There are people who think they know everything and can spot anything. And the great thing is to see them walk away and someone tell them I'm a man and see the expression on their face."

That expression can turn the world on its ear, Blackman says. And it's about time, he says; he's been on the bottom for years.

Eugene Blackman committed his first homosexual act

when he was 7, he says. It happened in the back yard of his house in Macon. He played the woman's role with an older boy.

"MY MOTHER didn't know about that at the time. But I guess she had an idea. I used to play with dolls and things."

By the time Blackman finished high school, everyone knew. In high school he began wearing women's slacks. He dyed his hair. He put on makeup.

He also learned that violence would be a part of his life. One boy told several of Blackman's friends he had "gone to bed" with Blackman. Blackman cut the boy with a razor.

"It wasn't a bad cut," he says. "I just wanted to show him I didn't play."

It was three years ago that Blackman started hustling. He got some instruction from another homosexual prostitute who goes by the name Tracy.

HE BEGAN MAKING more money hustling than working at a local restaurant. And so he quit the job and moved out on the streets full time.

Blackman uses no pimp. The only person that splits his money is the person with whom he shares an apartment.

And Blackman can move anytime. For the past year or so he has been in Atlanta, where his nightly profits might be between \$150 and \$200. But he needed to leave Atlanta for awhile because police there were watching him too closely.

So he returned to a much-changed Macon. When Blackman started hustling, he and a handful of others were the only gay prostitutes.

By his estimation and that of Macon police, there are upwards of two dozen male prostitutes working today, many of them as young as 16.

HE DOESN'T REALLY see them as increased competition, but as the development of a subculture that supports his life style.

Lacy is aware of the contempt he draws from much of the city. He says he hears people say he should be in an institution or dead.

"But one thing I won't do is change my lifestyle," he says. "After all, the only thing you have to do is be right when you leave this world. And Hell can't be no badder than this life."

Prize Winners Named

Winners of American flag posters offered as the local prizes in Cappy Dick's foreign places puzzle contest in the July 1 comic section are:

Cheryl Jackson, 12, 357 Fulton St.; Cam Adams, 7, 5176 Turner Circle; Chris Marshall, 9, 2972 Clairemont Ave.; Darlene Blash, 10, 2244 Knots St.; Macon; Adina Smith, 10, Box 773, Gray; Shane Patterson, 7, Route 1;

Cappy Dick Winners

zies offered as the local prizes in the peach-coloring contest in the July 8 comic section are:

Cam Adams, 7, 5176 Turner Circle; Robbie Hawkins, 7, 4286 Nisbet Place; Michael Asbell, 11, 3178 S. Walden Road; Jason Hill, 8, 1894 Madden Ave.; Jennifer Genone, 10, 1715 Foster

There was little recognition of transgender or otherwise genderqueer individuals throughout the 70s and 80s. This lack of recognition led to a lack of visibility and support for these individuals, which made it difficult for them to find acceptance in society. This lack of acceptance was often reflected in the media, with stories focusing on the individual's struggle to accept their identity—often leading to a common theme of sexual promiscuity and sex work, as being LGBT+ identifying was considered a sexual deviance by religious groups. In the side panel you see the discussion of queer identities being a "mental illness"—they discuss the common experience of gender dysphoria while using outdated terms to describe transgender people.

⁶ "Male Prostitute Likes His Job", July 2nd, 1979: 1d. Microfilm: 'Macon Telegraph 1979' 1. Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

“Without A Church”: Macon in the 70s

We would like to give special thanks to the Washington Memorial Library’s Genealogical & Historical Room for helping our team research and access historical newspapers from the 70s and 80s, uncovering vital information on figures and LGBT history in Macon. We encourage all readers to visit their archives to view the following material.

They are located at 1180 Washington Ave. Macon, GA 31201. Additional thanks to Demarcus Beckham for his contributions to this section of Macon history with his work on Johnny Fambro’s advocacy work.

Anita Bryant Visits Macon

Anita Bryant is a former American singer and beauty queen who became a prominent political activist in the 1970s. In the late 1970s, Bryant’s public profile shifted dramatically when she became an outspoken advocate for conservative social and political causes, particularly in opposition to LGBTQ+ rights. Her activism gained national attention when she led a successful campaign to overturn a Miami-Dade County ordinance that prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment and housing.⁸ The campaign was titled “Save Our Children From Homosexuality.” This effort was part of a broader movement against LGBTQ+ rights during this era, which included efforts to repeal similar protections in other cities. She is infamously known for being pied in the face by gay rights activist Tom Higgins in 1977 for her anti-LGBT+ campaigns.⁹



On December 9, 1978, Anita Bryant was set to perform at the Macon Coliseum. Bryant’s visit was part of a series of rallies and speaking engagements she conducted across the country to rally support for her cause. Her visit drew significant attention and controversy, reflecting the intense national debate over LGBTQ+ rights. An LGBT+ advocacy group known as the Macon Coalition of Human Rights organized a peaceful protest in response to her visit outside the coliseum. Seventy protesters joined in picketing in unity supporting LGBT+ rights and visibility.¹⁰ Leading the charge was well-known and openly gay Maconite Johnny Fambro.

⁷ “Anita Bryant: Sacred Concert Tour”, December 8th, 1978: 1a. Microfilm: ‘Macon Telegraph 1978’ 1. Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon

⁸ “Anti-Gay Organizing on the Right,” PBS, accessed Aug. 22, 2024, [GAhttps://www.pbs.org/outofthepast/past/p5/1977.html#:~:text=In%20January%20of%201977%2C%20the,campaign%20to%20repeal%20the%20ordinance.](https://www.pbs.org/outofthepast/past/p5/1977.html#:~:text=In%20January%20of%201977%2C%20the,campaign%20to%20repeal%20the%20ordinance.)

⁹ “Anita Bryant Hit in the Face with Pie,” History, n.d, <https://www.history.com/speeches/anita-bryant-hit-in-the-face-with-pie>.

¹⁰ Sidney Hill, “Bryant Not Only Issue in Quiet Gay Protest,” *Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Dec. 10, 1978.

Anita Bryant's presence in Macon prompted many conversations about LGBT+ issues and topics. At the time, a majority of LGBT+ individuals kept their identity a secret since Macon was a heavily Christian-centric city with churches on every corner. The Macon Telegraph covered a variety of opinions by churches, Maconites, and representatives of the Macon Coalition of Human Rights. Such newspaper segments included letters to the editor stating that "homosexuality should be a crime" and "homosexuality is not victimless," referring to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.¹¹ Churches within the surrounding areas of Warner Robins, Byron, Kathleen, Gray, and others publicly announced turning away LGBT+ identifying congregations.¹² In the image above, Dr. Louie Crew attended an "anti-Bryant" meeting and discussed the prevalence of these articles while displaying them in hand. He determined that the only disease Macon was suffering from was "homophobia."¹³ He showed a segment titled "Homosexuality is Immoral" and a comic strip titled "GOD's word and homosexuals" which displayed LGBT+ advocates as cultists trying to overturn society.¹⁴

Crew's impassioned speech emphasized the need for greater acceptance and understanding within the community. The protest and subsequent discussions marked a pivotal moment for LGBTQ+ visibility in Macon. Despite the backlash, the efforts of activists like Johnny Fambro and Louie Crew laid the groundwork for future strides in LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance in the region. This chapter in Macon's history serves as a testament to the power of activism and the importance of standing up for marginalized communities. The courage and determination displayed by Johnny Fambro, Dr. Louie Crew, and their fellow activists inspired future generations to continue the fight for equality and acceptance. Their legacy is a reminder that progress is possible, even in the face of adversity. It also set a precedent for future activism and visibility through organizations such as Central City AIDS Network and Rainbow House in Macon.

¹¹ "Homosexuality Should Be a Crime," *Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Oct. 25, 1978.

¹² Jane Oppy, "Pastors Wouldn't Welcome Unrepenting Gays," *Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Dec. 9, 1978.

¹³ Kevin P. Morison, "Gay Activists Planning Protest," *Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Nov. 9, 1978; "Peace Prevail at Protest Gatherings," *Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Dec. 10, 1978.

¹⁴ "Homosexuality is Immoral," advertisement, *Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Dec. 8, 1978; Gilead Baptist Church, "God's Word and Homosexuals," advertisement, *Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Dec. 9, 1978.

Letters to the Editor

'Homosexuality Should Be A Crime'

IT HAS been quite an education reading the various replies to the editor concerning the Lion's Club having Anita Bryant perform. I would particularly like to address myself to a letter of October 17.

The opposition to Miss Bryant is missing the whole point, at least in reference to her stand on homosexual conduct. Everyone has some freedom.

What you do behind closed doors is a result of that freedom. But don't expect the rest of us (who also have our freedom) to give your abnormal sexual preferences an air of respectability. And that's what homosexuals are asking. Those are the rights of free agency, to choose to be a homosexual. But our rights, to choose to place homosexuality in its proper perspective, as aberrant behavior, is a function of our free agency. The letter-writer said, "Wake up neighbors, educate and inform yourselves." I have done this.

The July 17 issue of Time magazine makes it clear that homosexuality is

Did God formerly condemn the practice but now finds it perfectly acceptable? How can he be God if he can't make up his mind? Certainly Jesus preached tolerance and love of all human kind. But he also condemned to death the wicked and perverse. How can one justify being a Christian while ignoring the very things Christ taught?

Perhaps one of the worst distortions is equating the treatment of the Jews and blacks with the disapproval of homosexual conduct. Were the Jews and blacks condemned for immorality? No. They were persecuted for something they had no control over, and those responsible for their inhuman treatment are condemned for all eternity. But immoral conduct can be changed. You can control your own appetites.

You could even go without! You're at the controls. Aren't you? So leave out the Jews and the blacks. Homosexuals are in a category by themselves, along with other immoral practitioners.

finally arrived, and the Supreme Court, using common sense, restored some of my faith in the courts of this country. The Bakke case decision would bring a smile to Thomas Jefferson's face.

Julian Bond expressed his opinion on the subject by saying, "They have let us sit in the main movie theater without having to sit in the balcony. They have let us sit in the front of buses without having to sit in the back. They think we should be satisfied with this and that they have given us enough."

That is a typical response from a black leader. The phrase "constitutional right" is abused beyond forgiveness. Blacks in this country have the opportunity. Possibly blacks use the word "equality" only as a stepping stone to "superiority."

Bakke is an example of the American dream. That dream is that if you have ambition, determination and preparation you can attain your goal. It would not be justice to deny an individual who is better prepared for

'Orchestra Needs Support'

THANK YOU and your staff for your support of the Middle Georgia Symphony Orchestra Week and our first membership drive. We are very encouraged with the public response to our drive, thanks to you, Carol Pennington and others in our area who realize the value of such an organization and are willing to do the necessary hard work to sustain such an effort.

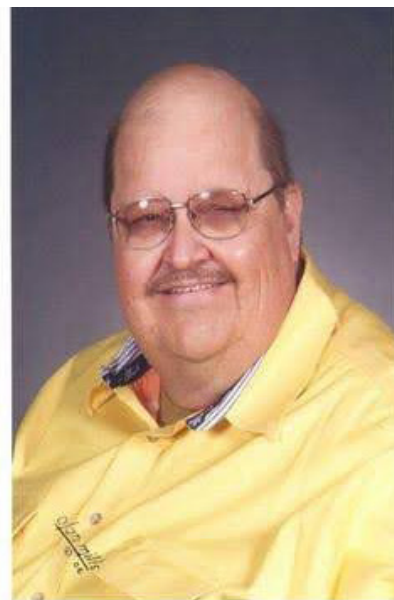
Talented musicians, subscribers and financial support are vital for our success. Thank you for the help you are giving us.

MARY ANN HARRELL
President
Middle Georgia Symphony

'Bryant takes a stand'

Johnny Fambro (1951-2014)

Johnny Fambro was a trailblazer and notable figure for his contributions to the LGBT community in Macon. Throughout his career, Johnny had been an advocate for inclusivity and equality, working to create a more welcoming environment for everyone in his community. His support for LGBT rights is evident through his active participation in local pride events and his work with organizations focused on advancing LGBT+ rights. Johnny had used his platform to speak out against discrimination and to promote understanding and acceptance within Macon and beyond. In addition to his advocacy, Johnny was an openly gay man that represented the community within many organizations such as Macon Coalition for Human Rights. He later went on to be the vice president of the Society for Individual Rights. He was the executive director of the Central City AIDS Network and Rainbow House in Macon.¹⁵



In 2011, Georgia Equality awarded Johnny the Guiding Star Award for his contributions to HIV and AIDs awareness. He was honored at “Evening for Equality,” an event held to recognize and honor LGBTQ+ and HIV activists from across Georgia for their contributions and advocacy. He accepted the award stating, “I do accept this in the name of all the people who died for this award, for all of the people who have helped, for all of my friends who have died, and friends I have never met. It was not me who did this. It was all of the people who stood behind me on cold and rainy nights.”¹⁶

Johnny passed away on October 14, 2014. In his obituary it is stated that if you wish to do something for him or honor his name, “Give a homeless person something to eat and hope.”¹⁷ To this we honor and celebrate the life and legacy of Johnny Frambo. To see more images shared by his friends and loved ones please visit:

<https://www.legacy.com/funeral-homes/obituaries/name/johnny-fambro-obituary?pid=172699335&v=batesville&view=guestbook&page=3>

¹⁵ “Evening for Equality Honors Gay, HIV Activists from Across Ga.,” *The Georgia Voice* (Atlanta, GA), June 24, 2011, <https://thegavoice.com/news/georgia/evening-for-equality-honors-gay-hiv-activists-from-across-ga/>.

¹⁶ “Evening for Equality Honors Gay, HIV Activists from Across Ga.,” *The Georgia Voice* (Atlanta, GA), June 24, 2011, <https://thegavoice.com/news/georgia/evening-for-equality-honors-gay-hiv-activists-from-across-ga/>.

¹⁷ “Johnny Fambro Obituary,” Legacy Remembers, accessed Sept. 26, 2024, <https://www.legacy.com/funeral-homes/obituaries/name/johnny-fambro-obituary?pid=172699335&v=batesville&view=guestbook&page=3>.

To read more about his work throughout the 70s up to 2011 we recommend reading Demarcus Beckham's piece "Bible Belt Gay Activism in the Age of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Johnny Fambro of Macon, Georgia, 1978-1996." Read Beckham's work in Middle Georgia State University's undergraduate research project Knighted: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research, 2018 Issue 2:

<https://www.mga.edu/arts-letters/docs/knighted-journal/issue-2/mobile/index.html#p=1>

AIDS & HIV Epidemic Hits Macon

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has been one of the most painful topics in queer history due to the devastating effects it had on the community. Many queer individuals have lost loved ones, family, and their own lives to the virus. It also caused fear and stigma, making it difficult for queer people to access testing and treatment. As a result of the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, many people have felt isolated and unsupported. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has had a lasting legacy, and continues to have a lasting impact on queer people today. In our research, we found newspaper articles and reports of how the epidemic began to impact the city of Macon and how Mercer University contributed to keeping students, faculty, and staff educated and safe.

AIDS is here to stay, CDC official tells Bibb County Medical Society

By Cheryl Fletcher
Macon Telegraph and News

Although 13,643 cases of AIDS have been reported, as many as 1 million Americans actually carry the AIDS-related virus and have the potential of spreading the disease to others, an official with the national Centers for Disease Control said Thursday.

"The great majority of these (carriers) have no symptoms at all," Dr. John Ward told members of the Bibb County Medical Society. "We're concerned from the public health standpoint that these people can spread it to others who, in turn, may show symptoms and develop AIDS."

All those who carry the virus, however, do not have acquired immune deficiency syndrome, which destroys the body's ability to fight off disease.

Ward said it isn't necessary to test the entire population for the virus. Instead it's better to educate the public on the virus' modes of transmission and how to guard against contagion and prevent its spread.

WARD, AN EPIDEMIC intelligence officer in AIDS activity, spoke to members of the medical society at a dinner meeting at the Mercer University School of Medicine. The school's dean, Dr. Douglas Skelton, heads a state task force that will recommend policies to local and state officials for limiting the spread of the disease.

No official policies have been developed on what to do once carriers have been identified, Ward said. Carriers should, however, refrain from giving blood or donating organs and know how to prevent further spread of the virus.

The physician stressed that the disease is transmitted through sexual intimacy and transfusions of contaminated blood products. Others people at risk are intravenous drug users and children of mothers who carry the virus or have AIDS.

About three-quarters of those afflicted are homosexual men between 20 and 50 years old.

Answering a question from the audi-

ence, Ward said the virus has not been found to be transmitted by mosquitoes or through tears and saliva.

Another question expressed concern over reports that two health care workers contracted the disease after exposure at work. In neither case, Ward said, has there been documented evidence that the workers were exposed by a needle prick or otherwise. The federal agency still is investigating the incidents.

CDC OFFICIALS predict that there will be more than 30,000 cases of AIDS nationwide by this time next year, Ward said. AIDS has claimed the lives of 227 Georgians, 182 of whom were from the Atlanta area.

Researchers are concentrating on developing a vaccine. Recent drug tests have shown that the virus that causes the disease can be blocked in some patients, but there's been no clear breakthrough toward a cure.

Health officials also are searching for clues to why some with the virus develop the fatal disease and others



Dr. John Ward

Says up to 1 million carry virus don't.

"We've got to adjust our thinking," Ward said. "This is not a disease that is going to go away, but it's something we're going to have to live with in the medical community."

In October 1983, the awareness of the spreading of the HIV/AIDS virus was reported to Maconites and Mercerians. The Macon Telegraph published an article titled "AIDS is Here to Stay, CDC official tells Bibb County Medical Society" in which they discussed the potential reasons for the spread of the virus and the current statistics within the state of Georgia.¹⁸ At the time, 13,643 cases had been reported in the United States and within Georgia there were twenty-six cases and nine deaths stemming from Atlanta. The Dean of the School of Medicine at Mercer University advised that they would follow state and federal policy to reduce the transmission. Dr. John Ward, an intelligence officer in "AIDS Activity," met with the dean and reported to the Medical Society that the disease was transmitted through sexual intimacy and transfusions of blood. Three quarters of those impacted were LGBTQ-identifying men. Additionally, the Macon chapter of the American Red Cross provided donors with pamphlets explaining who may be more at risk of contracting the illness. Many blood donation banks turned away LGBTQ men to avoid the risk of transmitting the virus via blood donation.

¹⁸ "AIDS is Here to Stay, CDC official tells Bibb County Medical Society", October 11, 1983: 1a. 'Macon Telegraph 1983' Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

That summer The Telegraph published another article describing the fear of the illness taking hold in Macon.¹⁹ Reporter Cheryl Fincher interviewed gay-identifying Maconites to gauge their opinions. One person reported having to become celibate in fear of contracting the illness, and a large proportion of the LGBTQ+ community had decreased sexual intimacy to lower the risk. Fincher also stated that it was important for people to remember that HIV is not a moral failing but rather a medical

AIDS From Page 1A

The word is spreading, but the disorder hasn't reached this area. Dr. Robert Wright, health director, said he has received no official reports of AIDS cases in the midstate's 14-county district.

Last Thursday, the national Centers for Disease Control reported 1,641 cases of AIDS with 644 deaths nationwide since 1979. Georgia has had 36 cases with nine deaths.

The fatality rate is about 40 percent, CDC figures show. Some calculations put the figure more at 50 percent depending on how long a victim lives.

As time goes by the chances of a person with AIDS dying are greater because the body has more opportunity for developing different kinds of infection. Victims are also prone to develop Kaposi's Sarcoma, a rare cancer.

The Macon Chapter of the

American Red Cross has received various inquiries relating to donating and receiving blood, said Jo Ann Weaver, executive director. Fifteen cases of AIDS nationwide have been attributed to blood transfusions. There has been one death of an infant who received blood from a man who later died and was diagnosed as having AIDS, she said.

"We give all donors an information pamphlet to help prevent the spread of certain illnesses. Our registered nurses also take case histories to screen donors," Weaver explained.

Joe, another homosexual in Macon, said he was not allowed to give blood in Atlanta when he answered questions concerning his sexual preference. He gave no indication that he or his intimate friends had AIDS.

"I was rejected," he said. "But with AIDS being so detrimental, I guess every-

one's being careful. I'm terribly afraid. It's scaring the general public, too, not just those 'cursed' men and women."

The Office of Biologics of the Food and Drug Administration has identified the following groups at an increased risk of developing AIDS. (This information is distributed to potential blood donors at the Macon Red Cross.)

Bush From Page 1A

A blackout pitched the windowless hall into darkness for about five minutes. The cause was under investigation, but authorities did not rule out the possibility of sabotage.

Outside, demonstrators shouted slogans such as "Chase the Yankees out and shatter NATO!" and "USA, SS, SA," coupling America with Hitler's notorious SA Nazi stormtroopers and SS special police.

Bush did not directly refer

to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization plan to deploy 572 U.S.-built nuclear missiles this year in West Germany, Britain, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The plan has sparked widespread protests in West Germany, where the bulk of Pershing 2 and cruise missiles are to be deployed if there is no progress in U.S.-Soviet arms talks in Geneva, Switzerland.

Kohl indicated that West

Germany is determined to carry out the NATO plan despite widespread popular opposition.

"We take no joy in armament. We take no joy in more missiles. We want to create peace with fewer weapons," Kohl said. But, he said, "we will do our part."

Bush used the occasion to attack Soviet policy.

He said he believed NATO must remain strong to preserve the democracy the German emigrants from Kiefeld crossed the Atlantic to find in Germantown, Pa. The Philadelphia suburb was founded 300 years ago.

in an epidemic in 1981. Sexual partners of persons at increased risk of AIDS.

Health Department clinics for patients with sexually transmitted diseases are open five days a week, Monday through Friday from 8 to 11:30 p.m. and from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

The clinics are confidential and open to anyone, free of charge, Rowland said.

more information on how to limit the spread and how to detect the virus early on. There was no further news from The Macon Telegraph about the epidemic until January 1983—when a blood test to detect the antibody that may have been the virus in screenings was developed.²⁰

August 18, 1987 was the next prominent time in the archives of the AIDS and HIV epidemic news with the failure of an education forum led by Mercer University Medical School on "AIDS Education Week" for Macon.²¹ There were only thirty people in attendance. Dr. Harold Katner, chief of infectious diseases at Mercer Medical School and a panel member at the event, expressed his disappointment in the turnout, especially considering he had treated thirty individuals in the past two years for the virus. Katner was a vital figure at this time for the education and treatment of the epidemic. In an article describing the disappointing turnout, Katner discussed the misinformation about contracting the virus stating, "People tend to be apathetic until it hits them directly . . . The disease is touching all of us. Not just a specific group of people. I don't know all the answers. I can keep them alive for a while, but I can't cure them."

AIDS education stressed, but forum turnout disappointing

By Denise Vance
Macon Telegraph and News

A panel of health-care officials and community leaders Monday night stressed the need for more AIDS education, but few Macon residents were on hand to hear.

About 30 people attended a forum on AIDS at the Mercer medical school auditorium, helping kick off AIDS Education Week in Macon.

Panel members touched on many different aspects of the disease, from its symptoms to economic and religious considerations.

"I'm surprised and saddened that so few have showed up," said the Rev. Leigh Ann Raynor, one of the five panel members. "I think people don't yet know that it concerns everyone."

Dr. Harold Katner, chief of infectious diseases at Mercer medical school, said he has treated more than 30 cases of AIDS in Macon in the past two years.

"People tend to be apathetic until it hits them directly," he said, adding that more than 2 million people nationwide are infected with the disease.

"The disease is touching all of us, not just a specific group of people. I

don't know all the answers. I can keep them alive for a while, but I can't cure them."

Katner said people need to know that AIDS can't be contracted through casual contact. "The most danger is when a person gets in contact with blood from an infected person."

One Roberts, District 3 senior epidemiologist and an AIDS educator, said teaching people about the disease is a "never-ending process."

Of 567 people tested for AIDS at the Macon-Bibb Health Department from 1985 to this past June, she said, 56 tested positive for the disease, although such a result doesn't necessarily mean that a person has the disease.

Congressman J. Roy Rowland, a member of the panel who also discussed AIDS during a local cable television broadcast, echoed those sentiments. AIDS is a disease of people, not of any particular group, he said, and "The disease needs to be addressed on a medical and scientific base."

Rowland has proposed a national commission for the study of AIDS that would spearhead further research on the disease. The national commission

would consist of 15 members, with no less than eight experts on AIDS.

"It's hard to know what recommendations will be made at this time," he said of the commission's work.

Rowland participated in a Cox Cable telecast which introduced the company's addition of the C-SPAN cable television station. Following the local program, Rowland stayed in the Macon studio to participate in a national C-SPAN program on AIDS.



¹⁹ "AIDs Test Coming, but Interpreting Might be Tricky", June 23, 1983: 1a. 'Macon Telegraph 1983' Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

²⁰ "Bibb Health Board Steps Up Attack on AIDs", January 23, 1990: 1a. 'Macon Telegraph 1990' Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

²¹ "AIDs Education Stressed, but Forum Turnout Disappointing", August 18, 1987: 1a. 'Macon Telegraph 1987' Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

Dr. Harold Katner was a significant figure in advocating for AIDS victims within Macon. He met his first afflicted patients in New Orleans on July 1, 1983, prior to moving to Macon to work at Mercer.²² It was an overwhelming experience to see patients constantly and knowing there was not

much he could do to help them. He could, however, try to educate the broader public of Macon on how to prevent the spread and to be kind to those suffering. He emphasized that it was not only men being impacted but women as well. He was shown in an issue of National Geographic magazine in 1994 treating a female patient, Fanny Tremblay. She went on to join him in

Campus News

Comments On The AIDS Forum

By John N. Tripp, M.D.
Student Health Services
Physician
Mercer Medical
School Faculty

On Monday night I attended the excellent lecture by Dr. Harold Katner in the Co-Op. I am pleased that such an opportunity was afforded the Mercer community and I commend those who arranged it. I am glad so many students were present, only wishing more could have been there.

Dr. Katner made several points which I believe should be known on campus. AIDS is host for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. People with AIDS suffer from unusual, life-threatening infections and/or rare forms of cancer. Often infections are caused by organisms that many of us harbor, but with intact immune systems we are able to keep them in check. There is no cure for AIDS and currently no viable treatment.

The virus also causes milder diseases called AIDS-Related Complex, which is characterized by persistent enlargement of lymph nodes, chronic fatigue,

fever, weight loss, night sweats, and abnormal blood counts. Some of these patients have gone on to have full-blown AIDS and some have gotten better without treatment.

The largest group of individuals infected with AIDS virus, however, are not currently ill. They have no symptoms and can only be identified by a blood test for antibody to the AIDS virus. We have no way of knowing whether an individual with such a positive test will develop AIDS. All individuals with a positive blood test, however, should regard themselves as carriers of the virus, regardless of the presence or absence of symptoms.

Dr. Katner told us some frightening figures about AIDS in middle Georgia. We found out that AIDS is not just a disease of faraway "others" but that there are probably 3,000 - 6,000 individuals in middle Georgia who are infected with the AIDS virus. Formerly thought to be a disease of homosexuals, IV drug abusers, and hemophiliacs (who receive lots of blood products), AIDS is now seen in heterosexual indi-

viduals who do not use IV drugs and are otherwise "normal."

We do know pretty well how AIDS is transmitted. It is not caught from toilet seats or mosquito bites, and probably not by kissing. It is transmitted by sexual intercourse, sharing needles, and blood transfusions. (Blood transfusions are unlikely sources for contracting AIDS. The Red Cross has screened all blood products in Georgia for over a year and blood containing antibodies to the AIDS virus is discarded and donors are notified that their blood has antibodies to the AIDS virus.)

Testing for antibodies to the AIDS virus is available in Macon. The procedure is anonymous and is done by the State of Georgia without cost to the individual. This testing is available at the Bibb County Health Department, across from the main entrance to the Medical Center of Central Georgia on Hemlock Street. The phone number is 745-0411, or you can just show up any time between 8:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. or 1:00 and 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Testing is done in the STD clinic at the back of the building. You will not be asked your name, will be given a number, and will have to obtain your own results by using that number.

As Dr. Katner pointed out, we all know enough to minimize our own chances of becoming

infected with the AIDS virus. All we need to do is remain celibate, avoid hypodermic needles, and refuse blood transfusions. Some, however, are unwilling to make all these choices. A great deal of thought has gone into developing guidelines for "safe sex" but there are no foolproof answers. Condoms, although not absolute, do afford considerable protection, but other measures are not available.

No one who has ever had sex with another individual can ever know for certain whether he or she is infected. We saw pictures Monday night of individuals in their early 20's who now have AIDS which they apparently

Continued on page 14

It Takes All Types

The Mercer Army ROTC Bear Battalion is composed of a diversified group of students. The individuals represent different ethnic and social backgrounds, genders, personalities, and thoughts. As diverse as our group is, none of the students mentioned charac-

teristics that would prevent them from active Army service to enroll in graduate school and if he desires, can later join the Army Reserves. That would simultaneously allow him to work in a chemical related field as a civilian while remaining "part-time" soldier.

males and females. ROTC has allowed Rena to be in identical positions of leadership and responsibilities as her male counterparts. She feels that the ROTC program developed hidden leadership characteristics which has improved her self-

education programs and how it affects women. Throughout the 80s and 90s his work included developing new treatments, educating students and the public about the disease, and working with communities affected by AIDS. He personally worked with Compass Cares in 1989 to develop better outpatient HIV/AIDS treatment.

Responsible Sexuality
LIFE AND DEATH: EXPERIENCE THE EMOTION
AIDS and STDs at Mercer

February 20 - 23, 1989

MONDAY: WHERE DO STUDENTS STAND? questionnaire and video 9 - 4 p.m. CSC "Deadly Silence" - a play about AIDS The Co-op, CSC - 7:00 p.m.

TUESDAY: FACING THE FACTS - booths and displays in CSC Focal Point Birth Control Workshop Room 336, CSC - 9:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY: HANDS ON EXPERIENCE - literature distribution "New Bugs and New Rules Session" (STDs) Pres. Dining Room, CSC - 1:20 and 4:00 p.m. Focal Point Birth Control Workshop Room 337, CSC - 2:30 p.m. Panel Discussion with experts and students Medical School Auditorium - 7:30 p.m.

THURSDAY: Open Forum with AIDS Patient, AIDS Family Member, and Aids Health Care Worker Medical School Auditorium - 7:00 p.m. (reception afterwards)

ALL WEEK: Contributions for AIDS Research will be taken at T's Corner. The goal is \$1,500, and donations will be made in the names of the actors in "Deadly Silence."

SPONSORED BY THE STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION AND THE OFFICE OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Meanwhile at Mercer University, *The Cluster* reported many events focused on educating students on the risks of the HIV/AIDS virus and how it can impact anyone. *The Cluster* published in their February 20, 1987 issue that the Student Government Association and Dr. Katner partnered to host a forum in the Connell Student Center.²³ The forum took place on February 23, 1987 at 7 p.m. and was titled "AIDS: A Threat to Heterosexuals." Dr. John N. Tripp wrote a reflection article on the forum as he was a physician at the student health services on campus and a faculty member of the Mercer Medical School. Tripp described how the AIDS virus was defined and the subsequent symptoms following the infection known as "AIDS-Related Complex," which includes enlarged lymph nodes,

²² Judith W. Smith, "Forty Years Later, Mercer Professors Continue Fight Against AIDS Epidemic," Mercer University, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://den.mercer.edu/forty-years-later-mercero-professors-continue-fight-against-aids-epidemic/>.

²³ John Tripp "Comments on the AIDs Forum" Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA, February 20, 1987.

Mercer Students Mark HIV @ 40

Join us to reflect on the impact of HIV/AIDS in the last 40 years, and be inspired to join the fight!

- Lots of raffle prizes to win!
- Lots of extra credit to earn!

LIST OF EVENTS

Film Fire in the Blood Date: November 10 Venue: STN 251 Time: 6:30pm Host: Africa Film Series	Film Bending the Arc Date: November 12 Venue: SEB 110 Time: 6:00-8:30pm Host: Asso. of Global Health	HIV Vigil Reflection Date: November 16 Venue: Newton Chapel Time: 7:30-8:00pm Host: Delight Ministries	Discussion Let's Talk about Sex Date: November 18 Venue: Willet SC 155 Time: 5:30-6:30pm Host: Planning Committee
New Edition GHIA Newsletter HIV/AIDS & Human Rights Date: November 22 Venue: IGS Website Host: GHIA Newsletter	Panel Discussion HIV & Human Rights Date: November 29 Venue: Zoom 968 3280 9877 Time: 5:00-6:00pm Host: GHIA Newsletter	Game Night Love Game Night Date: November 30 Venue: Ryals 206 Time: 6:00-7:00pm Host: Planning Committee	HIV Testing Testing & Resources Date: December 1 Venue: Penfield Time: 12:00-5:00pm Host: Common Ground
Research Exhibit Poster Presentation Date: December 1 Venue: Tarver Library Time: 1:25-2:15pm Host: HIV/AIDS in Africa	Drone Photo HIV/AIDS Ribbon Date: December 1 Venue: Cruz Plaza Time: 4:00pm Host: Planning Committee	Raffle Prizes!!!! Orange Parking Pass Gift Cards Gift Baskets Custom Gifts Lots More	

Inquiries: Dr. Obidoo | obidoo_c@mercer.edu

The BRICK z BEANS COFFEE **QuadWorks** **Mercer Police**

chronic fatigue, fever, weight loss, night sweats, and abnormal blood counts. Additionally, some individuals may be asymptomatic despite a positive diagnosis. Students and others in attendance were surprised to find out that as many as three to six thousand people in Macon may already have the virus, which contrary to stigma impacted multiple demographics. At the time, many believed that the AIDS virus predominantly affected LGBTQ+ men and those who used intravenous drug abuse, hemophiliacs, or those who received blood supplements for health concerns.

Furthermore, the ways in which the virus could be transmitted was discussed and Dr. Katner dispelled misunderstandings of how it spread. The virus is not spread through kissing, toilet seats, or mosquito bites but through sexual intercourse, sharing needles, and blood transfusions. The Red Cross at this time tested blood donation for antibodies of the virus, informed

donors of their possible diagnosis, and discarded their donation. The Bibb County Health Department offered free and anonymous antibody blood tests for anyone concerned of potential infection. Dr. Tripp ended his reflection with advice to any students coming to the clinic with questions and offering to defer to Dr. Katner for any questions he may not know the answer to.

Later that year in October 1987, the scandal of Mercer University being nominated in the top ten party schools in the nation took hold of most newspaper media, including *The Cluster*.²⁴ Due to this, there is further limited coverage on the epidemic in archival material. We do know however that forums were still held up to 1989, as seen in the following flier. In January 1990, Congress passed the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA).²⁵ The program provided housing assistance, medical care, and support services to people with AIDS. It also provided education about AIDS prevention, testing, and treatment. In addition to this program, the Bibb County Board of Health approved \$16,026 to pay for salaries and supplies for Macon's AIDS Street Team. This team was composed of local volunteers who worked to educate Macon residents about AIDS and to provide support services to people with AIDS. They also provided access to testing and treatment.

²⁴ John Tripp 'Responsible Sexuality; Life and Death: Experience the Emotion; AIDS and STDs at Mercer' Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA, February 20, 1987.)

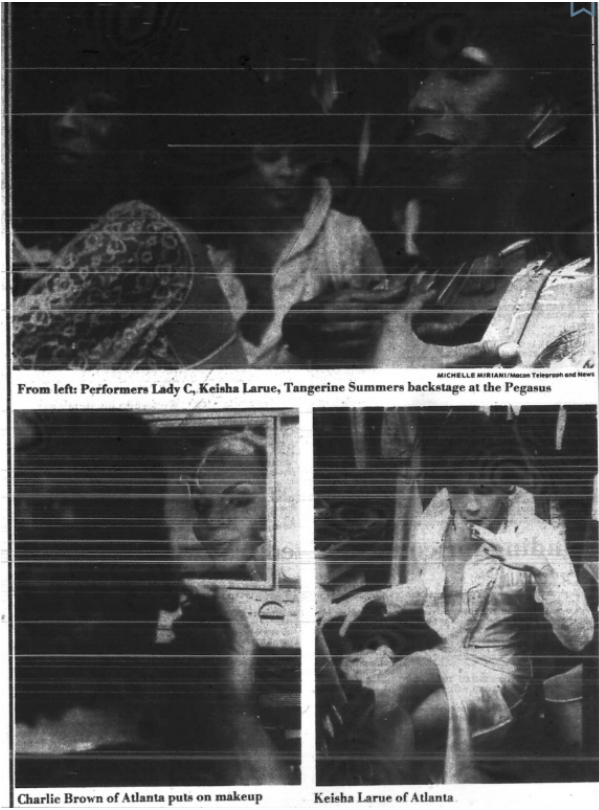
²⁵ "Bibb Health Board Steps Up Attack on AIDS", January 23, 1990: 1a. 'Macon Telegraph 1990' Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

Overall, the response to the AIDS epidemic in Macon during the late 1980s and early 1990s exemplifies a community's effort to combat a public health crisis through education, support, and proactive measures. Despite initial misunderstandings and stigmas, local health authorities and community organizations worked tirelessly to provide accurate information, testing, and essential services to those affected. Their collective efforts laid the foundation for ongoing awareness and support, ultimately contributing to a more informed and compassionate approach to managing the epidemic.

There have been ongoing efforts of Mercer professors who have been dedicated to combating the AIDS epidemic for over forty years. The professors, including Dr. Katners, Dr. Jeffrey Stephens and Mercer Professor within Global Health and Africana Studies Dr. Chinekwu Obidoa, have been instrumental in research, education, and advocacy related to HIV/AIDS.²⁶ Dr. Katner personally has conducted over five hundred community education programs in the Middle Georgia area to teach youth about practicing safe sex and maintaining good health. In the fall 2021 semester, the forty-year anniversary of these efforts was celebrated through various events hosted around campus educating on the history of the AIDS/HIV epidemic.

²⁶ Judith W. Smith, "Forty Years Later, Mercer Professors Continue Fight Against AIDS Epidemic," Mercer University, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://den.mercer.edu/forty-years-later-mercero-professors-continue-fight-against-aids-epidemic/>.

Tangerine Summers (1960 - 2023)



From left: Performers Lady C, Keisha Larue, Tangerine Summers backstage at the Pegasus

Charlie Brown of Atlanta puts on makeup

Keisha Larue of Atlanta

In addition to all the efforts of Dr. Katner and multiple organizations dedicated to serving the Macon community impacted by the epidemic, the queer community was also contributing through entertainment and culture. On August 5, 1985, thirty “female impersonators,” or as we commonly know them now, drag queens, performed at the Pegasus Lounge in Atlanta.²⁷ They performed to raise money for Atlanta’s Hospice for Victims of AIDS, hoping to raise \$2,500. Among the thirty queens was Maconite Ray Grissett otherwise known as Tangerine Summers.

Tangerine was a beloved member of the queer community in Macon. She was known for her vibrant personality and her generous heart. She was an inspiration to many in the community and her death in 2023 was mourned by many. Her legacy continues to live on in the community. She was the self-acclaimed “oldest drag queen” in the city. Tangerine comments on her early life and career in drag in the documentary series “Macon’s

Hidden History” by the Historic Macon Foundation.²⁸ She describes how she performed in talent shows in high school by singing and playing along with “girl songs,” winning the contests. Tangerine was seventeen years old when she started performing in drag; this was the height of the seventies. Her first drag name was Ray Jean, but it did not sound right when they announced her to come to perform. She loved tangerines and brought them to work with her every night so she renamed herself Tangerine. She got her last name, Summers, from singer Donna Summers since Tangerine impersonated the singer.

Tangerine described how in the 70s and 80s it was difficult for drag queens due to the “masking law,” which essentially made it a crime to be dressed in the opposing gender’s clothing. Tangerine was arrested almost weekly for “breaking” the law. In the police station, Tangerine would have to strip her drag clothes in front of cops—a very humiliating experience to have all her clothes, shoes, and padding on the floor. She was fined \$150-175 for each offense with no jail time. The only exceptions for drag was on Halloween and at annual Cherry Blossom Festival events around Macon. Many queens and LGBT-identifying people were harrassed on the streets of Macon, as Tangerine recalled consistently being thrown slurs by passing cars. Experience within the drag scene was also difficult for queens of color as they were not given as many bookings or chances to claim pageants titles when competing against white queens. In 1982, Tangerine was the first winner and first drag queen to win Miss Cherry Blossom, an annual pageant

²⁷ “Drag Show Benefits AIDs Victims”, August 06, 1985: ‘Macon Telegraph 1985’ Genealogical & Historical Room, Washington Memorial Library, Macon GA

²⁸ Ethiel Garlington, dir., “Tangerine Summers” Hidden History, season 1, Episode 5, November 9 2020, historicmacon.org.

during the Cherry Blossom Festival. Tangerine, impersonating actress Mae West, was dared to enter the pageant. She beat out all the cisgender women competing in the pageant though the pageant coordinators kept this secret. She was also the second black queen to be crowned Miss Gay Maker.

While working in Atlanta, Tangerine moved bars several times due to closure and one location burning down. She ended up working at the Pegasus Lounge with fellow queens. She worked with Rupaul, an internationally famous Drag Queen, when she was known as Bootsy. Tangerine remained in Macon until her death in 2023 at the age of 73. She was an inspiration to many queens and will be remembered for her contributions to drag. When Tangerine was interviewed by “Hidden Histories” interviewer Elliot James, she was asked, “. . . is there any more work [in Macon] that you see in hindsight that we still need to do? And what is that?” she responded:

Yeah . . . Just we just need to come together. Stop making boundaries. And this group over here and this group over here. You know, it’s like that in the gay community. We need to pull together as a whole and stop being separate. You got the drag queens. You got the transgender. You got the camp drag. You got the butch. You know. You if you get we all the we all the same, you know. Stop category, you know. That’s what I want to see. Just stop labeling each other, You know? Because we are all human. If you cut me, I won’t bleed. If I cut you, you’re gonna bleed. Our blood it’s one color until it hits the air and it turns red. You know? So just before I leave this world, I would just like to see that our community just come together. Unite.²⁹

30



To learn more about Tangerine Summers, check out “Hidden History” by the Historic Macon Foundation:
<https://www.historicmacon.org/lgbtq>

²⁹ Ethiel Garlington, dir., “Tangerine Summers” Hidden History, season 1, Episode 5, November 9 2020, [historicmacon.org](https://www.historicmacon.org).

³⁰ Myracle Lewis, “Living Your Authentic Self Is Very Powerful,” AOL, <https://www.aol.com/living-authentic-self-very-powerful-080135080.html>.

“We Were Ninth?”

Mercer’s most notorious encounter with “immoral student behavior” occurred in the late eighties with their feature in *Playboy*. In 1987, *Playboy* released their October edition of their erotica magazine. This issue was particularly special as they had launched their “Women of the Top 10 Party Colleges” list in which publishers interviewed various college students and their communities across the nation. The most-well known “party-schools” of the time landed in the top five such as California State University at number one and the University of Miami as runner-up. However, to the shock of Maconites, Mercer University made number nine on the list, beating out other known party-schools of Georgia.

“Playboy is Calling!”

It began May 1, 1986 when a writer from *Playboy* magazine, Wayne Duvall, phoned Mercer University. Ron Light, president of the Interfraternity Council (IFC), decided to take the call. Light was cautious of the call as it did not seem legitimate. He received Duvall’s number and called him back; its legitimacy was confirmed once he reached *Playboy International* Incorporated. Duvall had initially called to inform the university of its nomination for “Playboy’s Top 40 Party Schools” and wished to learn more about the “party scene” following a set standard of questions. Duvall interviewed Light on students’ “lifestyles, backgrounds, party-styles, goals in life and main reasons students attend their school.”¹ Following those seemingly routine questions, Duvall asked about more provocative behaviors of students regarding sex lives and relationships with drugs and alcohol. Duvall mentioned that he heard rumors about Mercer’s infamous Tuesday night parties through neighboring university students. He asked if ten o’clock cocktail parties took place during chapel break everyday, like rumored. It is

PLAYBOY’S TOP 40 PARTY SCHOOLS

In its January issue, *Playboy* set tongues wagging nationwide with this list of campuses where fun supposedly takes precedence over everything else.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, Chico | 21. UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, College Park |
| 2. UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI, Coral Gables | 22. UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI, University |
| 3. SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY, San Diego | 23. WEST GEORGIA COLLEGE, Carrollton |
| 4. UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT, Burlington | 24. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, Austin |
| 5. SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY, Pennsylvania | 25. MASSACHUSETTS INST. OF TECHNOLOGY, Cambridge |
| 6. UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT, Storrs | 26. UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS, Lawrence |
| 7. WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY, Morgantown | 27. KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY, Manhattan |
| 8. PLYMOUTH STATE COLLEGE, Plymouth, New Hamp. | 28. GLASSBORO STATE COLLEGE, Glassboro, New Jersey |
| 9. MERCER UNIVERSITY, Macon, Georgia | 29. UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, Gainesville |
| 10. UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Charlottesville | 30. EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY, Richmond |
| 11. STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, Cortland | 31. UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, Iowa City |
| 12. COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY, Fort Collins | 32. UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, Norman |
| 13. ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY, Tempe | 33. BROWN UNIVERSITY, Providence, Rhode Island |
| 14. UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, Las Vegas | 34. OHIO UNIVERSITY, Athens |
| 15. BOSTON UNIVERSITY, Boston | 35. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, Amherst |
| 16. CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY, Mount Pleasant | 36. UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, Athens |
| 17. SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, Carbondale | 37. LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY, Baton Rouge |
| 18. BALL STATE UNIVERSITY, Muncie, Indiana | 38. UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, Rolla |
| 19. OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY, Stillwater | 39. REED COLLEGE, Portland, Oregon |
| 20. CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE U., New Britain | 40. FAIRHAVEN COLLEGE, Bellingham, Washington |

—COLLEGE PRESS SERVICE—

Playboy To Start Interviewing Mercer Students For Oct. Issue

The famous Playboy photographer David Chan will be interviewing students for the October “women of party schools” issue. You must be at

least 18 and a full or part-time Mercer student. For information call David Chan, Friday March 6 - Saturday March 14 at 912-746-1461 for information.

unknown if Light confirmed or denied such rumors. Eight months later in *Playboy*’s January 1987 issue, they announced their list of top forty party schools in the nation.² Mercer had been placed at ninth.

¹ W.M. King, “Mercer Nominated by Playboy for Ability to Party,” *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), May 9, 1986, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3486>.

² “Playboy Names Top Party Schools,” *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), Jan. 16, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3499>.

Recruitment Process of Mercer Models

The placement of Mercer on the list was the least of concerns for the university once *Playboy* wished to expand the article to an official release in the *Playboy* October 1987 edition which included "Women of the Top 10 Party Colleges," chosen from the top ten colleges from the previous top forty list. Many universities denied their students' participation and barred *Playboy* photographers from their campuses.³ All the young women that were willing to pose from the top ten colleges were recruited by *Playboy* photographer David Chan. After traveling to colleges across the country, Chan arrived in Macon in February 1987 to recruit Mercer students. Chan placed advertisements for models in the various Macon newspapers and ran interviews until March 14, 1987. The ad made its way into the student newspaper *The Cluster*. Mercer officials hoped that student editors of *The Cluster* would not show the advertisement.

4

Baxter Gillespie

Caught Between The Scylla And Charibdes *Or, What To Do About The Playboy Ad*

Wednesday the CLUSTER received an ad soliciting women to pose for their October "Women of Party Schools" issue. As Editors Mike and I were caught in a bind. Should we run the ad? or should we just bag it? Well, as it turned out, the ad was not correct. It stated that Playboy photographers were on campus. This fact is far from the truth for the obvious reason that Mercer does not and will not support Playboy's position. Also, Playboy seems to be

using Mercer as a tool to strike out at the Southern Baptist Convention. Let's get real folks, Mercer is not a party school however, it is fun to be known for something.

Mike and I decided to ask the Student Publications board for advise on the ad issue. This way at least we would know what the "official" stand was. I was advised to not run the ad but to write or create a news story on this issue. You can find the

news story on page one of this issue. Still though, in all fairness to the students we wanted you to have a chance to see what this ad looked like. Bear in mind that this ad is not correct and that we as editors feel that this ad should not be reproduced in its original form so . . . we have specially encoded it for your viewing displeasure. Secret decoders can be found in any bathroom or dorm room so that you may be offended in privacy.

³ "Party Colleges' Try to Keep Playboy Off Campus," *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), Feb. 27, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3506>.

⁴ "Playboy to Start Interviewing Mercer Students for Oct. Issue" *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), Feb. 02, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3506>

On February 25, 1987, Playboy submitted an ad to recruit Mercer students to pose for their October Issue. The Cluster reported this interaction in their February 27 issue.⁵ Due to the misleading language of the ad, stating that photographers would be on campus, The Cluster editors rejected the ad. However, the editors decided to post the ad under the pretense of analysis in a news story. To avoid any potential retaliation for reproducing the ad, they flipped the flyer to be mirrored. The ad has been restored to its original positioning below.

6

**PLAYBOY'S
PHOTOGRAPHER
IS NOW
ON CAMPUS.**

PLAYBOY photographer David Chan is now interviewing students on this campus for a fall pictorial. It will feature coeds from the nation's Best Party Schools (as featured in the January '87 PLAYBOY). To qualify, you must be 18 years of age or older, registered full- or part-time at this university. Call now for more information and to schedule an interview.

**Mercer University
Students:**

Call David Chan

Friday, March 6 -
Saturday, March 14

Macon Hilton
108 First Street
(912) 746-1461

PLAYBOY
WOMEN OF THE PARTY COLLEGES

OCTOBER 1987

⁵ "Party Colleges' Try to Keep Playboy Off Campus," *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), Feb. 27, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3506>.

⁶ "Playboy's Photographer is Now on Campus" *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), Feb. 02, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3506>

The Photoshoot: Slumber Party At MU!

The ads were successful. The *Playboy* October 1987 edition, which included “Women of the Top 10 Party Colleges,” displayed eleven female Mercerian models donning their school logo and spirit attire—of the clothing that was shown. Two of the models posed nude for individual shots, while nine posed for a pillow fight in a dorm for a slumber-party themed shoot. Featured to the right are three of the students who posed for the article. *The Cluster* interviewed Lelee Reed, Nancy Felser, and Susanne Meadows, revealing their recruitment and experience in the shoot.⁸ Their interviews were released in the April 3, 1987 edition of *The Cluster*, five months before the release of the *Playboy* issue.

All three women reported how they went through an interview process which included signing consent forms for their images to be used in the release. The forms included descriptions of themselves, eye color, age, major, and hobbies. Additionally, the photoshoot staff asked in what form the students would be willing to be nude. Options included nude, semi-nude, and clothed. In the preliminary interview, photos were taken via polaroid for later review to determine who would model. Each model at the time of *The Cluster* interview reported they may be paid twenty-five dollars upon the release of the issue.

David Chan passed away on October 17, 2017, and his work as a photographer of *Playboy* was well-known. Deriving from Vancouver Canada, Chan was very proud of his Chinese heritage and often introduced his culture to playmates (*Playboy* models).⁷ He made sure to include all the young women employed by *Playboy* by inviting them to his family Christmas gatherings. He recruited many playmates and many have commented on how he changed their lives and took a father-like role in their lives. He was not only praised for his professionalism but for being “graciously polite and humble.” Hugh Marston Hefne, the founder of *Playboy*, was personally devastated by Chan’s passing in 2017.



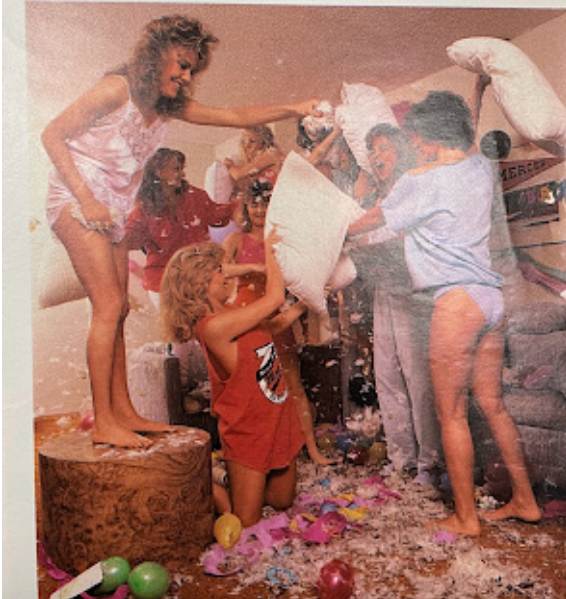
Susanne Meadows was twenty-two years old at the time. She held the advertisement of the *Playboy* recruitment ad from *The Cluster* up to her mirror to read the phone number. She promptly contacted David Chan. The full photoshoot took place on March 16, 1987. *Playboy* provided all the clothing and props for the shoot, including a Mercer tank-top that read “Mercer University #9 Party School” worn by Felser. The team supplied pizza, a birthday cake, and male strippers for the photoshoot as a celebration. The students described it as more humorous than sexy. They reported the shoot was done tastefully and with the utmost respect for all the women being photographed. All three models divulged that there was one student that posed nude and may be shown in the release of the issue. The models were not told who posed and the photos were confidential before the publishing. Now it is known that the student, “Jules Holland,” had been the student model for the single nude photo published in the issue. We were not able to confirm if this was her real name or her pen name for the issue.

⁷ Devin Devasquez, “Paying Tribute to Hef, Playboy & David Chan,” Devronn’s Blog, Nov. 13, 2017, <https://www.devronnsblog.com/paying-tribute-to-hef-playboy-david-chan/>.

⁸ Baxter Gillespie, “An Interview with Three of Mercer’s Playboy Models,” *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), April 3, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3508>.

MERCER UNIVERSITY (#9), Macon, Georgia
 "We get 'em from all over—sunny Florida,
 lusty Georgia, you name it."

When Playboy arrived at quiet, Baptist-affiliated Mercer University, Macon residents inundated their local newspapers with protests and condemnations. Meanwhile, life in the dorms (below) went on as usual, and students such as Jules Holland (bottom) showed us that true Southern hospitality. Jules is a gourmet cook who doesn't cotton to guys "who talk to my chest."



9

JULES HOLLAND

As for their family support, Meadows's and Reed's mothers were stoked by the news. Meadow's mother reported she would buy a hundred copies. At the time, the models had not faced any repercussions from their sororities or the university. However, the Georgia Baptist Convention made threats to expel the students for their participation. Meadows responded in kind saying, "I'm 22 years old and there is no way they can tell me what to do. That's why I did it!"¹⁰ Reed and Felser shared the same opinion. The magazine was titled "Back to Campus Issue" and released in October of 1987 with the inclusion of the photos of Mercerian students. The cover featured playmate Brandi Angela Brandt, an American model and actress. The

following months and year became chaotic for Mercer University and the Macon community.

⁹ "Back To Campus" Playboy, October 1987, Vol. 34, No. 10, 128

¹⁰ Baxter Gillespie, "An Interview with Three of Mercer's Playboy Models," *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), April 3, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3508>.



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¹¹ "Back To Campus" Playboy, October 1987, Vol. 34, No. 10, Cover

Going Forward: Godsey v. GBC

Robert Kirby Godsey

Dr. R. Kirby Godsey was the seventeenth president and spent more time as president than any others in Mercer history, serving from 1979 until 2006.

¹² Before becoming president of Mercer, Godsey, at various times, worked with the Danforth Foundation as a Danforth Associate, taught religion and philosophy as a professor at Judson College in Alabama, was a dean and vice president at Averett College in Virginia, and was a dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the executive vice president at Mercer University. Godsey earned many degrees throughout his career, including a bachelor's degree in history and religion (Samford University), Master of Divinity (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary), Master of Arts (University of Alabama), Doctor of Theology (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary), Ph.D. in philosophy (Tulane University), honorary doctorates of humane letters (University of South Carolina, Samford University, and Campbell University), and an honorary doctorate of laws (Averett College in Virginia). Currently (2024), he serves as the chancellor of Mercer University.¹³



Some of the most notable developments at Mercer during his presidency include:

- The establishment of:
 - The School of Medicine
 - Stetson-Hatcher School of Business
 - School of Engineering
 - Tift College of Education
 - James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology
 - Townsend School of Music
 - Mercer University Press
 - The Executive Forum
 - Mercer Engineering Research Center (MERC)

¹² "Office of the Chancellor," Mercer University, <https://www.mercer.edu/about-mercer/office-of-the-chancellor/>.

¹³ "Organizational Leadership," Mercer University, <https://www.mercer.edu/about-mercer/organizational-leadership/>.

- The merging of the Georgia Baptist College of Nursing with Mercer University
- Partnerships between Mercer and:
 - Piedmont Healthcare (Atlanta)
 - Memorial Health University Center (Savannah)
 - The Medical Center of Central Georgia (Macon)
 - The Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex
- Mercer University's separation from the Georgia Baptist Convention ¹⁴

Outside of Mercer related accomplishments, he has had many other notable accomplishments and responsibilities throughout his career, including:

- The publishing of multiple books ¹⁵
 - *When We Talk About God, Let's be Honest* (1996)
 - *The Courage Factor: A Collection of Presidential Essays* (2005)
 - *Centering Our Souls: Devotional Reflections of a College President* (2006)
 - *Is God a Christian?: Creating a Community of Conversation* (2011)
 - *God Particle* (2016)
- Member of the Executive Council of the College Commission for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools¹⁶
- Member of the Executive Committee of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
- Member of multiple professional and civic committees and boards
- *Georgia Trend Magazine* included him on a list of the top 100 most influential Georgians (1998, 2000, 2002, 2003)
- Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) III Chief Executive Officer of the Year (2002)
- Named the Macon Citizen of the Year by the Macon Chamber of Commerce (2003)
- Honored by the Georgia House of Representatives and Congress (2006)
- R. Kirby Godsey Administration Building on Mercer's Macon campus is named after him

¹⁴ "Office of the Chancellor," Mercer University, n.d, <https://www.mercer.edu/about-mercero/office-of-the-chancellor/>.

¹⁵ "R. Kirby Godsey," Goodreads, n.d https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/612377.R_Kirby_Godsey.

¹⁶ "Office of the Chancellor," Mercer University, n.d <https://www.mercer.edu/about-mercero/office-of-the-chancellor/>.

The Georgia Baptist Convention v. Playboy

The Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC) and Mercer University were once again at odds but this time regarding the *Playboy* scandal. In 1987, *Playboy* released their October magazine “Back to Campus Issue,” which featured an article titled “Women of the Top 10 Party Colleges.” Mercer University placed ninth overall.

The GBC was very aware of the situation prior to the October publication through *Playboy*’s January 1987 issue which included their top forty list of party colleges across the nation, where Mercer was initially announced as ninth place. The media reported recruitment of students to model for *Playboy* across the nation and brought attention to our small university in Middle Georgia. The GBC executive committee met on March 11, 1987 at the Atlanta Baptist Center with the goal of determining how they would punish potential students posing for *Playboy*. The committee approved Robert Clayton’s proposal to expel any Mercer students that might pose for the magazine with a 54-20 vote. Francis Tracy of Harlem argued against the decision stating, “I’m in favor of what he said. But I am against directing the trustees to take action that is clearly illegal. There are much less expensive ways to make a point.”¹⁷ The decision was made after a grueling interview of former Mercer University president, Kirby Godsey.

Godsey Defends Student Expression

Former University President Kirby Godsey was extensively interviewed about the behaviors of Mercer University and its student newspaper *The Cluster* in the March committee meeting. Godsey adamantly defended Mercerians and *The Cluster* against the committee in regards to their rights as students and as citizens of the United States. When asked if students would face repercussions for posing for the magazine, Godsey reminded the counsel that students over the age of eighteen are adults and therefore have the right to make a decision to pose without repercussions of the institution, in line with the First Amendment. That the GBC and Mercer University are not the law, Godsey stated that they “must conform to the basic laws of this nation and this state” and that “it will be an act of civil disobedience to expel a student who poses.”¹⁸ Consequently, if students faced repercussions for posing off campus, *Playboy* would have a means to sue the University and the Georgia Baptist Convention for a breach of the First Amendment right for the models.



President Kirby Godsey

The *Playboy* advertisement that was designed to recruit Mercer students to pose for the magazine’s October edition was published in *The Cluster* (See “We Were Ninth?” page 43). The student-run newspaper mirrored the ad to avoid any legal repercussions, but this action angered the GBC. The committee suggested that the editor of that issue be punished for his actions, and Godsey fiercely defended the student. Godsey apologized to the GBC for the advertisement’s placement and its misleading language

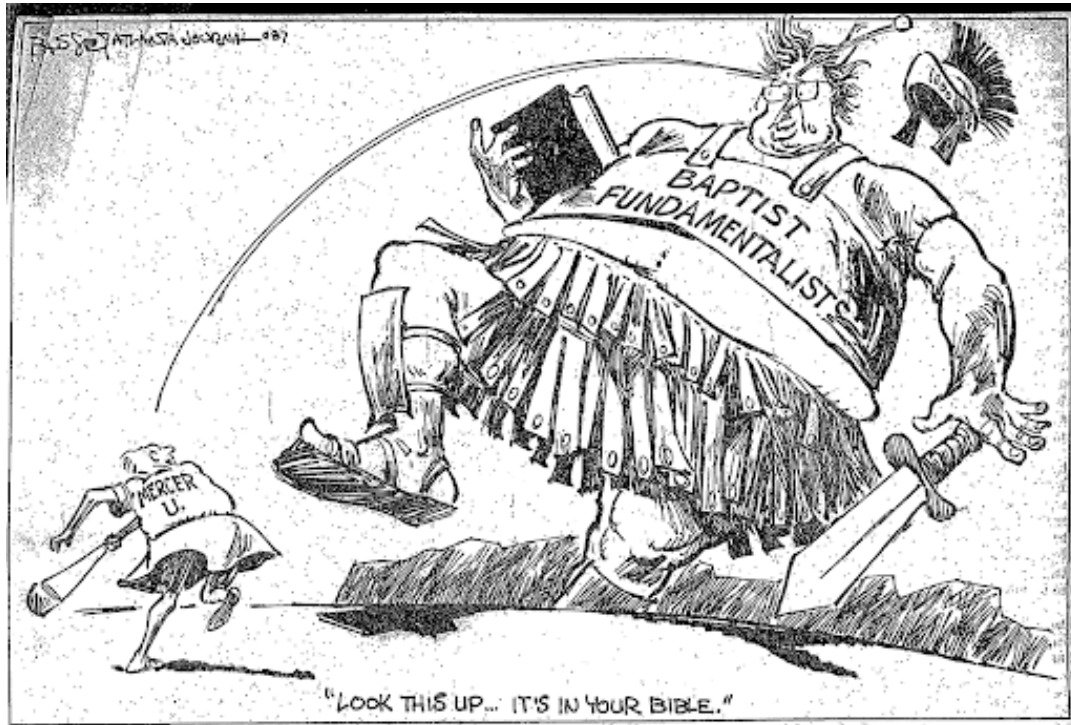
¹⁷ Baxter Gillespie, “An Interview with Three of Mercer’s *Playboy* Models,” *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), April 3, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3508>.

¹⁸ Baxter Gillespie, “An Interview with Three of Mercer’s *Playboy* Models,” *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), April 3, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3508>.

that misrepresented the university's image. In response to the committee's threats of the editor, Godsey conceded that they evaluate new guidelines and restrictions on the student newspaper but dismissed the notion of firing the student editor responsible. Godsey set the precedent that student editors should be able to learn from their mistakes and have the room to make them in the first place. In the days following the meeting being released to the public, Mercer students supported Godsey and thanked him for his amazing service to the university and all its students.¹⁹

¹⁹ Baxter Gillespie, "An Interview with Three of Mercer's *Playboy* Models," *Mercer Cluster* (Macon, GA), April 3, 1987, <http://hdl.handle.net/10898/3508>

Lee Roberts's Campaign Against MU



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The tension within the Macon community sprouted campaigns against Mercer as an institution, with Lee Roberts of Marietta leading the charge.²¹ Shortly after *Playboy* featured Mercer, Roberts published a smear campaign against Mercer that included many grand accusations against the university based upon articles from *The Cluster*. In his essay written as a letter to Georgia Baptists, he referenced publications from *The Cluster* related to birth control, movie nights, and of course, the *Playboy* ad. Throughout his letter, he apologized to his readers for showing and telling them about some of the events and beliefs related to Mercer, demonstrating how strongly he felt that what he was writing about was unacceptable.

The first main section of his letter contained a series of quotes from President Godsey from lectures he gave in 1987 that he used as evidence of Mercer's ideologies being against Baptist values. Most of the quotes were very short sentences taken from his lectures, with the context in which they were spoken largely being omitted. Many of the quotes also implied that Godsey believed in a God who is not conditional on his love and does not necessarily need Christians to follow an exact list of rules in order to be loved and accepted by him. Overall, based on these quotes, Godsey seemed to be claiming that God will not stop loving someone because they sin or if they do not believe in his existence but instead have unconditional love for all. Roberts also cited a personal conversation he had with Godsey in which Godsey allegedly stated that he did not believe that Jesus died for our sins. Roberts critiqued these beliefs and used it, along with an excerpt from a report by the GBC on what they expected from their schools (e.g. for the faculty of the school to actively practice and believe in Christian and Baptist ideas), to support his claim that Mercer University was going against Baptist beliefs and the expectations of the GBC.

²⁰ "Baptist Struggle Offers Lesson for the Rest of Society". October, 1987 [Subject Folder]: "GBC - News Clippings - 1987-1989" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon,

²¹ "Lee Roberts: Campaign Pamphlet". October, 1987 [Subject Folder]: "Playboy 1987" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon,

Roberts proposed a question to his readers asking whether they think Mercer should return the money they had received from the GBC during Godsey's time as president because of this and seemed to believe himself that this should have happened.

In the second section of his letter, Roberts discussed the culture at Mercer and Mercer students, beginning with Mercer's inclusion in *Playboy* and the nude pictures of Mercer women included in the magazine. He once again critiqued Godsey and his decision to not punish these students. In addition to this, Roberts cited multiple articles and advertisements in *The Cluster* and events on campus as evidence to support his claim, including:

- An advertisement for a Mercer event that included information implying that alcohol would be served at the event
- A book titled *Called to Preach, Condemned to Survive*, which was published by Mercer University Press and uses swear words
- A book published by Mercer University Press titled *Jesus: The King and His Kingdom*, which Roberts stated depicted Jesus as a revolutionary
- A book published by Mercer University Press titled *Patient in the Womb*, which Roberts cited as evidence for Mercer supporting abortion
- A book published by Mercer University Press titled *Religion, Revelation, and Reason*, which discusses evolution and the possibility of being able to talk to those who have passed away
- An excerpt from a book written by a Mercer alumni included in *The Cluster* that discussed sex in a positive manner
- An ad for condoms and an ad for national condom week in *The Cluster* that Roberts described as a positive promotion of unmarried sex
- An ad that a student placed in *The Cluster* asking for help finding a personal belonging he lost while drunk
- A quote from the Mercer Fraternity Advisor implying that partying was normal on the weekend but stated that it should not be happening on the weekdays
- Articles in *The Cluster* discussing rock bands, which Roberts critiqued due to a band's alleged promotion of drugs, queerness, and "satan worshiping"
- The showing of R-rated movies on campus

These examples given by Roberts were followed by a quote from the GBC stating that their schools should create an environment where Christianity and Christian ideals and practices are encouraged, which Roberts implied was not happening at Mercer.

In the third part of his letter, Roberts discussed Mercer's trustees and how Mercer was one of three universities (and the only one in Georgia) affiliated with their state's Baptist convention that did not have their trustees openly elected by the state convention. Instead, three of the nine new trustees each year were selected by Mercer alumni, and the other six were selected by the GBC Nominating Committee. However, the GBC was given a list of possible individuals to choose from for their six selections. In addition to this, the President's Council at Mercer often included individuals who finished their term as a trustee and moved over to this committee until they would be allowed to run for a trustee position again, sitting in on and contributing to trustee meetings during this time as well. Roberts critiqued this system and was concerned about it leading to the issues he identified since Mercer had so much control over their own trustees. He also showed concern over the small number of pastors on the Board of Trustees (three) and the president's council (four), stating that this goes against GBC guidelines which stated that twenty-five percent of trustees at GBC institutions needed to be pastors. He also found it concerning that Mercer was not choosing many pastors for these boards and connected this back to the issues discussed prior. He also stated that Mercer did not agree to send him names and contact information for every trustee and member of the president's council or a copy of the Mercer University Constitution, By-Laws, and amendments. He saw all of this as an indication of secrecy from Mercer that he found concerning.

IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT YOU TAKE THE TIME THAT IS NECESSARY TO READ THIS INFORMATION IN ITS ENTIRETY.

Roberts also referenced a meeting he had with the chairman of the Board of Trustees in which he received some of this information and was told by the chairman that if the GBC did not allow Mercer to continue their system of selecting their own trustees, then they would leave the GBC and acquire their funding from independent Baptist churches in Georgia instead.

IT IS WITH A DEEP SENSE OF REGRET AND A DESPAIRING HEART THAT I PROVIDE YOU WITH THE ENCLOSED INFORMATION. I WOULD RATHER NOT BE THE ONE TO DO SO, BUT THERE ARE EVENTS UNFOLDING AT MERCER UNIVERSITY, ONE OF OUR CHERISHED BAPTIST UNIVERSITIES, THAT CAN NO LONGER BE OVERLOOKED. TO DO SO WOULD BE AS MUCH A SIN AS IS WHAT HAS HAPPENED THERE. YOU ARE URGED TO STUDY VERY CAREFULLY AND VERY PRAYERFULLY THE ENCLOSED INFORMATION. PRAYERFULLY DECIDE WHAT YOU SHOULD DO AND THEN RESPOND TO THE SITUATION IN WHATEVER MANNER GOD LEADS YOU TO RESPOND IN BUT ALWAYS KEEPING IN MIND THAT IT IS THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND NOT OURSELVES THAT WE SEEK TO BRING HONOR AND GLORY TO.

LEE ROBERTS
ONE TOWER CREEK PLAZA, SUITE 550
3101 TOWER CREEK PARKWAY
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30339
OCTOBER, 1987

In the final section of his letter, Roberts explained multiple rumors that he had heard in regard to what the GBC was planning to do about these issues, including cutting ties with Mercer altogether. He also advised his readers to reach out to Godsey and the trustees at Mercer to voice their concerns, try to get their concerns to the GBC, relay the information in this letter to those at their own churches, and have messengers for the GBC to attend and vote at the next GBC convention. Overall, Roberts called for a change in Mercer's selection of trustees to instead be nominated by the GBC Nominating Committee and to be selected by messengers for the GBC. He also emphasized his concerns for President Godsey's beliefs and asked his readers to voice their concerns as well. However, this did not end up happening.²² While moderate Georgia Baptists did show up to the convention, they pushed against Roberts's campaign and reversed much of what the fundamentalist movement had succeeded in already. This included not

NOTE
THIS INFORMATION RELATES ONLY TO MATTERS CONCERNING THE GEORGIA BAPTIST CONVENTION AND MERCER UNIVERSITY. SBC ISSUES ARE NOT INVOLVED

²² "Baptist Struggle Offers Lesson for the Rest of Society". October, 1987 [Subject Folder]: "GBC - News Clippings - 1987-1989" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon,

re-electing the fundamentalist GBC president that was in office at that time, which marked the first time an incumbent had not been reelected in the history of the GBC.²³ Godsey voiced his gratitude for the students, faculty, and supporters of Mercer who spoke out about the issue and sought to become GBC messengers so they could vote at the convention and show their support for Mercer themselves.²⁴ Prior to the convention, there were discussions and worries regarding a possible split between the GBC and Mercer, but ultimately people were reminded that due to the closeness of this campaign to the convention for that year, bylaws in place did not make it possible.²⁵

Overall, the letter was met with disagreement from Mercerians and Maconites, specifically in terms of Roberts's call for changes in Mercer's trustees and administrators. In response to this campaign, President Godsey also did an interview with *The Christian Index* where he clarified his theological beliefs and emphasized that he was not a universalist like Roberts was suggesting. He claimed that Roberts took many of his quotes out of context.²⁶ Godsey stated that he does believe Jesus died for our sins, but that he also thinks there is more to it than that. He also stated that while he does believe that God has universal love for all, he also believes in Hell and what happens if someone does not accept that love. The editor of *The Cluster* at the time many of the ads and articles Roberts referenced were published also spoke out and stated that many were taken out of context and were there to educate students, not to encourage certain behaviors.²⁷ Godsey made a written statement rejecting a call for an investigation of Mercer due to these claims, emphasizing how seriously they take their Baptist heritage, which includes academic freedom and freedom of religion.

Godsey was described as being a "hero" at Mercer during this time for the way he stuck up for academic freedom on campus.²⁸ He commented on how united the Mercer community became over this conflict and how he did not think such unity had ever occurred at Mercer before. For example, a meeting with Godsey about the issue was described as feeling like a "pep rally" due to the large amount of support he received from the student body for his response to this issue. However, that does not mean that there was no disagreement from the Mercer community, as there were some students who spoke out agreeing with more GBC involvement in the choosing of trustees and tougher punishments for those involved in the *Playboy* photos. There were also a few Georgia Baptist churches who decided to or threatened to stop funding Mercer due to the allegations or if Mercer did not make changes.^{29 30}

²³ David Corvette, "Moderates, Godsey Savor Gains at Baptist Convention," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Nov. 12, 1987.

²⁴ Christi Daugherty, "Mercer Alumn Gather in Delight To Celebrate 'A Day of Victories,'" Georgia Baptist Convention (GA), November 12, 1987; Gayle White and Hank Ezell, "Baptists Gear Up For Convention," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Nov. 8, 1987.

²⁵ Gayle White and Hank Ezell, "Baptists Gear Up For Convention," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Nov. 8, 1987.

²⁶ R. Kirby Godsey, interview by The Christian Index, "My Personal Faith," Unknown Date. The Christian Index, [Subject Folder]: "GBC - News Clippings - 1987-1989" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon,

²⁷ Christi Daugherty, "Mercer Alumn Gather in Delight To Celebrate 'A Day of Victories,'" Georgia Baptist Convention (GA), November 12, 1987

²⁸ R. Kirby Godsey, "The 1988 Georgia Baptist Convention", October 3, 1988, Office of the President, [Subject Folder]: "GBC - News Clippings - 1987-1989" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon,

²⁹ David Beasley, "Mercer President Finds Allies on Campus," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Oct. 18, 1987; David Beasley, "Macon Campus Appears to be United in Denouncing 'Debauchery' Charges," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Oct. 13, 1989.

³⁰ Gustav Niebuhr & Hank Ezell, "Atlanta's First Baptist to halt Mercer funds," *The Atlanta Journal*, Atlanta, GA, unknown date, [Subject Folder]: "GBC - News Clippings - 1987-1989" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon,

Mercer trustees also sent out a statement to CLAS faculty stating that while Mercer does not allow alcohol to be available on campus, R-rated films being shown on campus, ads related to contraception or alcohol in *The Cluster*, *Playboy*, etc., they also do not support the GBC being heavily involved in decisions at Mercer and re-emphasized that Mercer controls itself.³¹ They also stated that their board of trustees should be as diverse as the Mercer community and therefore should not be made up of only Baptists and that religion should not constrain the learning environment at Mercer. While Baptists would make up most of the trustees and religion would still be a significant part of campus life, the trustees emphasized that Mercer was more diverse in its education.

Mercer professors, such as history professor Dr. Carlos Flick, also expressed concern over this and worried about himself and his colleagues being judged as professors based on their religious beliefs if fundamentalists took control of Mercer.³² Flick called Mercer a “broader” institution than the “Bible college” he stated the fundamentalists wanted them to be. While Roberts insisted that what he was calling for would not put the religious freedom of professors outside of the religion department in danger and that academic freedom did not have to do with what he was calling for, the Mercer community was still concerned.

Professor of Christianity at Mercer Walter B. Shurden wrote an article addressing the situation as well, where he explained that this issue was part of a larger issue among Baptists in the South rather than a Mercer-specific issue.³³ He also claimed that this was not an issue with Mercer students, faculty, or administration, but it was instead an issue of Baptist fundamentalists such as Roberts trying to control Baptist thought throughout Georgia. Overall, many responses made to Roberts’s campaign were from those in Macon and associated with Mercer, and most of them disagreed with what Roberts was calling for and many discussed the larger issue among Southern Baptists that Shurden also referenced.

In an article from the editor of *The Christian Index*, Jack U. Harwell validated many of Roberts’ concerns, but he also emphasized the importance of maintaining the relationship between Mercer and the GBC. Harwell also assured that many of the issues Roberts discussed, such as Godsey’s theological beliefs, had already been addressed.³⁴ According to Harwell, Godsey had recently voiced beliefs that closely aligned with those of Baptists. He defended Godsey and the trustees and warned against making any decisions that would cause damage to Mercer’s standing as a GBC university. Roberts’ campaign targeted Harwell, leading to Harwell’s early retirement.³⁵

³¹ Sammy Greer, email to the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Mercer University, Nov. 4, 1987. [Subject Folder]: “GBC - News Clippings - 1987-1989” Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon.

³² David Beasley, “Mercer President Finds Allies on Campus,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Oct. 18, 1987.

³³ Walter B. Shurden, “Mercer a small part of big drama,” Unknown Date, Folder 2, Box 24: Collection Mercer – Lee Roberts Controversy (1987)

³⁴ Jack U. Harwell, “Caution Required in Mercer Situation,” *The Christian Index*, Macon, (GA), October 22, 1987.


³⁵ Don Schanche Jr., “Godsey Gets Kudos from General Assembly,” *The Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Feb. 16, 1988.

What's so Wrong With Playboy?"

An estimated eleven Mercer students modeled for the edition. Susanne Meadows, Lelee Reeds, Nancy Felser, and Jules Holland were publicly known as students recruited for the edition. The aftermath of the released magazine was met with mixed student reactions, strong reactions from the Baptist community, and the enagement of the GBC. Mercerian Karen Jacobs, the editor-in-chief of *The Cluster*, expressed that the issue of students posing for Playboy was one of too much distraction.³⁶ She felt it was in the administration's right to expel students for posing for a magazine that did not align with the values of the institution or the GBC.

Lay it to rest

By KAREN JACOBS
Editor-in-chief



The situation with Playboy has received much attention in recent weeks due to the publication of its October edition, which includes photos of women from its Top Ten party colleges. Since Mercer was ranked ninth, the release of this issue was one that some associated with the university awaited anxiously, while others felt it was something they could live without.

The publicity surrounding Mercer and Playboy has helped to increase tension between the administration and members of the Georgia Baptist convention. Earlier in the year, the Cluster reported that the Georgia Baptist Convention

asked Mercer to immediately expel any females who posed for Playboy. The administration in a commendable action did not do so.

A Mercer student cannot attend this university for four years and not be remotely affected by or confronted with the fact that it is a Baptist university. In that sense, we are all obligated to act in ways that reflect positively on that Baptist heritage. It's time to lay the Playboy issue to rest and get on with education.

Incidentally, Playboy Enterprises International did send an ad previewing its October issue to the Cluster, but Mercer publication guidelines prohibit acceptance of

such advertisements (see student publication guidelines, page 6). The Cluster would not have run the ad anyway because such advertising is journalistically in bad taste.

Lastly, I would like to bring to attention the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution. This is significant because it commemorates the signing of the document which established the world's first government of the people, by the people and for the people. Tribute to the Constitution. Church bells in downtown Macon rang from 6:05 to 6:45 p.m.

Happy 200th Birthday to the symbol of our ideals of freedom, justice, and equal opportunity!

In the same issue published on September 18, 1987, *The Cluster* reprinted a sermon given by a professor known as Dr. Gaddy discussing the nuanced effects of *Playboy* versus Mercer University.³⁷ He asked, "What is so wrong with *Playboy*?" Gaddy contextualized the discussion of this with the mention of the "sexual revolution" of decades past. According to Gaddy, the revolution blurred lines between personal values, societal normalities which confused the boundaries of societal cultural trends, and biblical ethics. He then stated several reasons as to why *Playboy* is wrong. He stated it "devalues being" as it restricts itself to misogynistic expressions of gender for women and men—which goes against the notion that we are all made in "God's image" and there is not a superficial standard of beauty that is attainable. His second reason was that *Playboy* "ignores love," which contributed to the problem of making sex transactional and less meaningful between partners. This lead into many more reasons such as that the magazine "avoids commitment," is "anti-sex," "eliminates mystery," "falsely claims liberation," "trivializes intercourse," "ignores the dangers of sex; ie sexual assault, STDs, infidelity, etc," and many more reasons. Many of his reasons relied upon the interpretations of sex according to the Bible. We encourage you as a reader to read this sermon and come to your own conclusions regarding the issue of pornography and sex as it is a personal and diverse interpretation to each person.

³⁶ Karen Jacobs, "Lay It to Rest," Opinion, Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Sept. 18, 1987, <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/3518>.

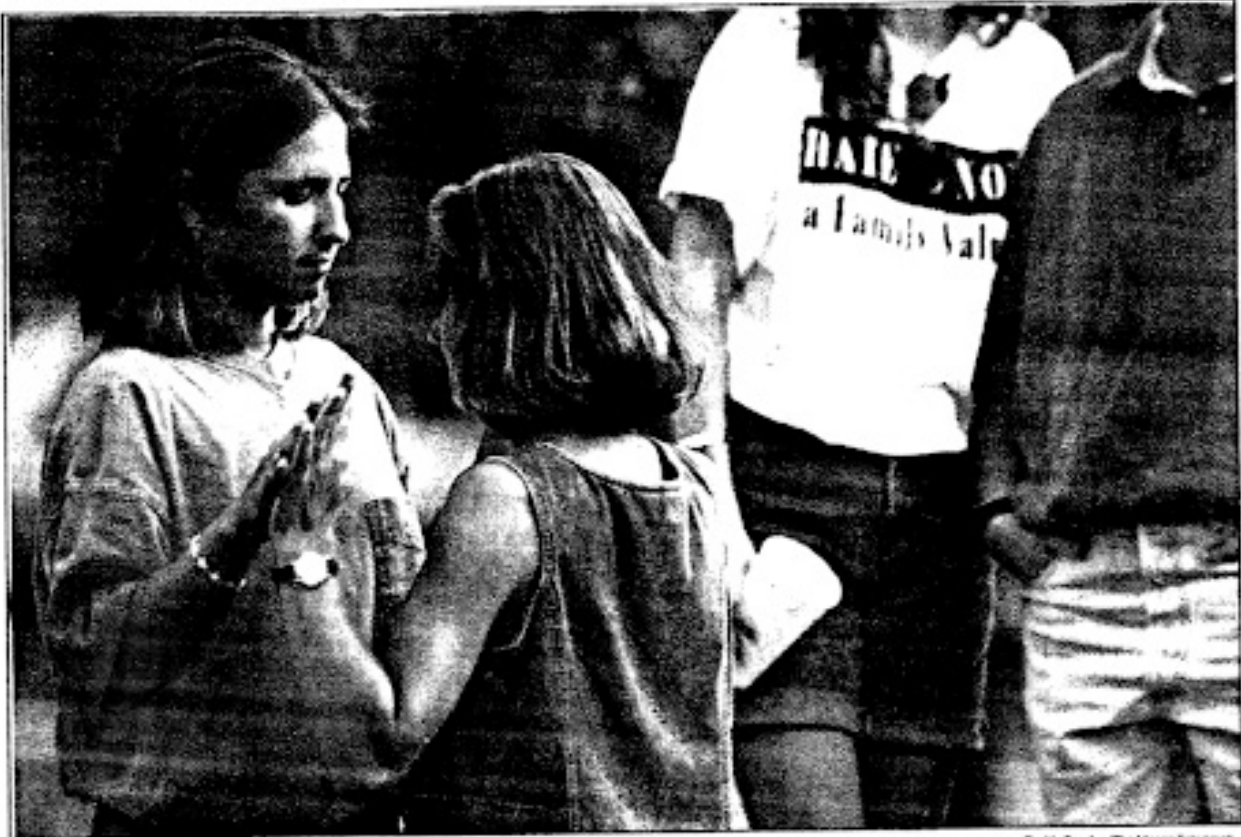
³⁷ Karen Jacobs, "Lay It to Rest," Opinion, Mercer Cluster (Macon, GA), Sept. 18, 1987, <https://ursa.mercer.edu/handle/10898/3518>.

Throughout *The Cluster* at this time, there were many depictions of sex-positive advertisements for condoms and sporadic opinions of students not finding issue with Mercerians posing for *Playboy*. We find it important to include the controversy of *Playboy* because it not only represents another issue between student expression and academic freedom with the GBC but also demonstrates an issue of sexuality. Students of consenting age attending Mercer from the 1980s to 2005, the year of severance, had to have considered this as an influence from either the college, their churches, or other religiously affiliated organizations when exploring their identities as adults in their twenties.

The First Pride Rally in Macon

Macon and Mercer throughout the early 90s was peaceful. However, beneath the surface, there was a growing movement for LGBTQ+ rights and recognition. The peaceful atmosphere of the 90s provided a backdrop for the First Pride Rally in Macon, where individuals began to openly celebrate their identities and advocate for equality.

A Show of Pride: June 23, 1995



David L. Sandys / The Macon Telegraph

A show of pride

6-23-95 1B
—Mercer University students Gretchen Massey, 21, left, and Natalie Glenn, 23, dance to live music at the first annual Gay Pride Rally and Picnic at Orange Street Park in Macon Friday evening. About 75 people attended the rally. There were balloons, barbecue sandwiches and cole slaw, singing, hand-holding and even a political newcomer. Macon resident Johnny Fambro used the forum to launch his

campaign for a Macon City Council post. Friday's gathering, sponsored by the LesBiGay Connection, was in honor of the Stonewall riots in New York 26 years ago, which Fambro said 'many believe is the start of the current battle for equal rights. That is correct — equal rights — not special rights.' A story on Fambro's city council bid is on 2B.

¹ "A Show of Pride: June 23, 1995". June, 23 1995, Macon Telegraph, Macon, Ga, [Subject Folder]: "Mercer Triangle Symposium - 2005" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA,

The MACON Telegraph

Local & State

Sunday **B**
June 21, 1998

Straight Talk **2B**
Obituaries **4B**
Opinion **6B**

Macon's first gay pride festival low-key

By Erin McClam
The Macon Telegraph

Chris Coggins looked around, saw a few dozens of men and women waving rainbow-striped gay-rights flags, hugging and dancing to techno music in Central City Park, and wondered aloud if she was dreaming.

"I don't feel like this is real," said Coggins, organizer of the first Macon Pride lesbian and gay rights festival, which peaked Saturday morning with a parade through the city and a celebration in the park. "I don't feel like this is happening. It's going so smoothly."

Coggins and many others among the 100 people who turned out Saturday said they were surprised the celebration didn't stir any controversy. She said she

expected a few protesters — or at least some red tape from the city.

"The city has been wonderful," said Rose West, who came from Atlanta for the march. "This is the first time I haven't seen anything yelled, or rudeness or attitudes. There's been none."

The marchers, representing wide ranges of age and sexual orientation, were vocal about several causes that they said will be gay-rights battlegrounds in coming years.

Bruce Posnak, a Mercer University law professor who marched, said he wanted more cities and states — or the federal government — to adopt policies outlawing discrimination by sexual orientation. Others talked about same-sex marriage and domestic-partner benefits.

"We can't be silenced and live in

closets anymore," said the Rev. John Hankins, who was walking hand-in-hand with his partner of seven years, Andy Mullins. He said both of them had been fired from jobs for coming out as gay men.

"Unless we get out and let people see us, we'll never have equal rights. I shouldn't lose my job because I bring my husband to the company picnic."

Richard Jacobson and his wife, Faye, founded Macon's chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG, four years ago. He said he came to the celebration Saturday in support of "civil rights for all Americans."

"We're tired of our kids being discriminated against," he said.

Please see **MACON'S, 4B**



Nick Oza / The Macon Telegraph

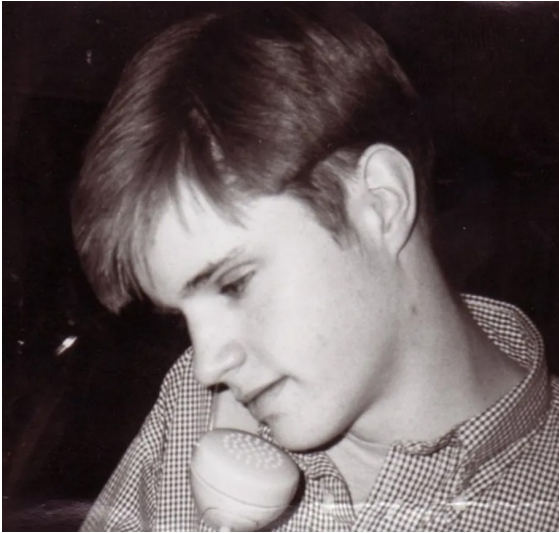
Dozens of men and women turned out for the first Macon Pride lesbian and gay rights festival, which peaked Saturday morning with a parade and a celebration in Central City Park.

² "Macon's First Gay Pride Festival Low-Key". June, 21 1995, Macon Telegraph, Macon, Ga, [Subject Folder]: "Mercer Triangle Symposium - 2005" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA,

Matthew Wayne Shepard (He/Him)

(December 1, 1976 -October 12, 1998)

In the late 1990s, Matthew Shepard's death became a catalyst for change, galvanizing the LGBTQ+ community and allies to push for stronger hate crime legislation and greater social acceptance. It highlighted the pervasive discrimination faced by queer individuals and inspired a movement for equality and justice, leading to significant legal and societal advancements in the early 2000s.



On October 6, 1998, twenty-one year old University of Wyoming student Matthew Wayne Shepard went to get a drink from a bar where he was approached by two roofing workers, also twenty-one, who began a conversation with him.^{3 4} The two men got Matthew into their truck, where they used a gun to intimidate and rob him. Then, they tied him to a fence with a clothesline and beat his head and face with the gun (roughly nineteen to twenty-one times). Eventually they took his shoes and left him tied to the fence, where he remained in the cold for the next eighteen hours. He was in a coma when he was found.

Matthew was eventually spotted and taken to a hospital but had been beaten so badly that his parents were only able to identify him through his braces. He suffered from four fractures in his skull and a crushed brain stem as a result of the attack as well as hypothermia from being out in the cold for so long. Unfortunately, Matthew never woke up from the coma and passed away less than a week later on October 12.

The two men eventually confessed that their plan was to “act gay” in order to gain Matthew’s trust. Matthew was openly gay and participated in planning LGBTQ+ event at his school, which is actually what he was doing prior to arriving at the bar that night. While the two men were eventually charged with murder and sentenced to life in prison, they were not charged for a hate crime.

While a large part of the nation rallied behind Matthew and his family, including many celebrities and politicians, there was still hate directed at Matthew even after his death. Protestors, led by a Kansas preacher, showed up to Matthew’s funeral with signs where they used slurs and yelled about how he was now “burning in hell.” Intense security had to be used at the service and Matthews’s parents only recently (2018) were able to lay their son to rest, as they kept his ashes in their home partly out of worry that wherever he lay would be vandalized.

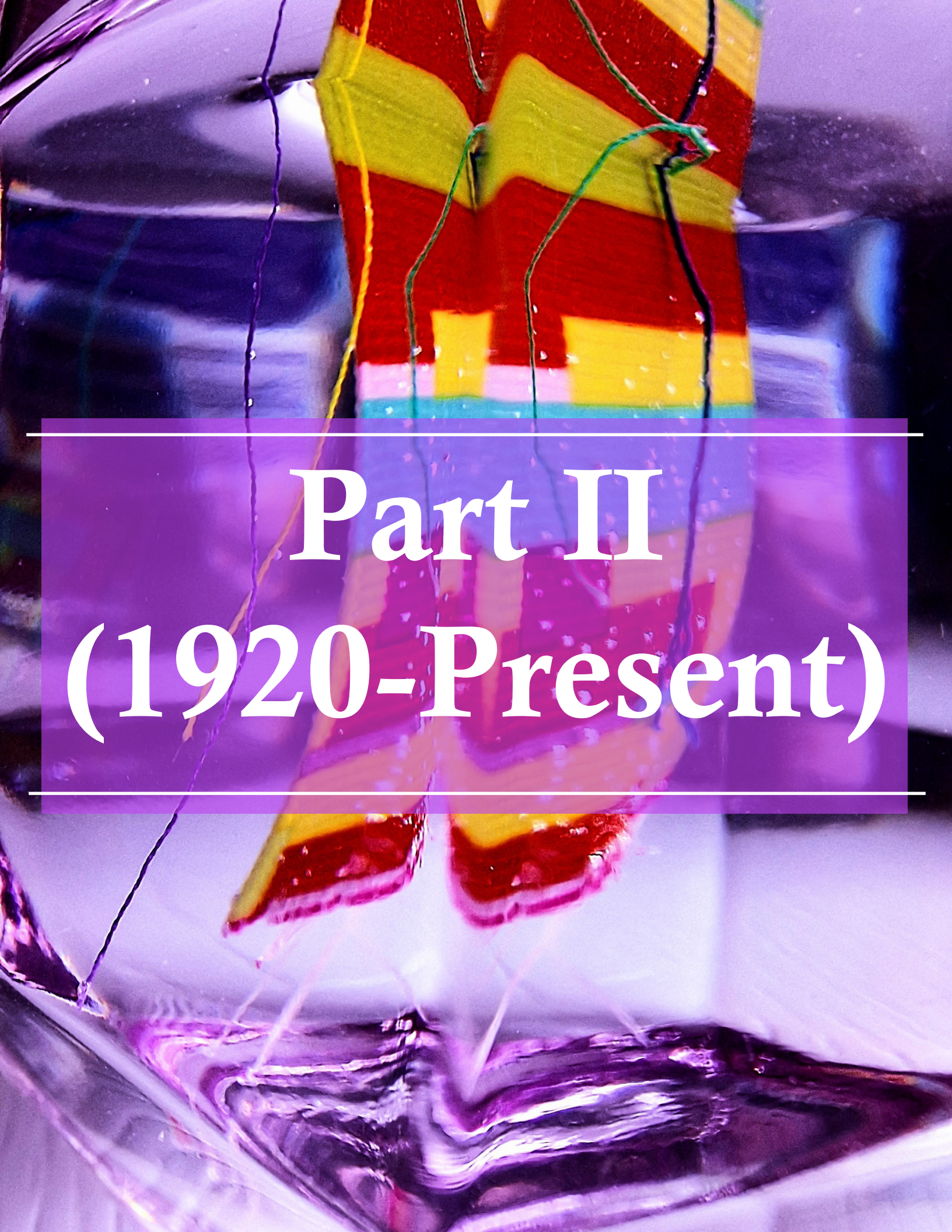
³ Jude Sheerin, “Matthew Shepard: The Murder That Changed America,” BBC, Oct. 26, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45968606> ;

⁴ “Matthew Shepard,” Biography, last modified Oct. 7, 2020, <https://www.biography.com/crime/matthew-shepard>.

Many conversations started and actions were taken as a result of Matthew's death, specifically surrounding homophobia and hate crimes. While people had varying opinions on this topic, the conversation did result in the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (2009). This law revised the existing hate crime law to have crimes motivated by what the perpetrator assumes or knows to be the victim's gender identity included under the law and to amend what was already included regarding hate crimes against other identities, including sexual orientations.

Erin Porter, a Mercer University alumna, knew Matthew Shepard personally and recalled how she saw an article about him in a newspaper after he was found and spent the following days waiting for the next paper or the nightly news so she could hear updates on him and his health. More recently, she reflected on Matthew's death and current cases similar to his in the news today. She stated, "It's 2024. Shouldn't we have moved on from 1998? . . . It's surreal to watch time move backwards." While it has been more than twenty-five years since Matthew Wayne Shepard's death, he was in no way the last queer person to be harmed on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Read the rest of Erin Porter's Interview on page 362



Part II

(1920-Present)

Church Splits from the GBC in the early 2000s

Upon entering the 2000s, the Georgia Baptist Convention began to have conflict with Baptist churches that were members of the convention. These conflicts arose primarily because some churches began to adopt more inclusive stances towards LGBT individuals, which clashed with the GBC's more conservative views. As a result, the GBC decided to expel churches that openly supported LGBT rights or welcomed LGBT members, leading to significant splits within the convention. This decision was met with both support and backlash, as it highlighted the growing divide within the Baptist community over issues of inclusion and acceptance.

¹



In 1990, Reverend Tim Shirley, an alumnus of the Mercer University Atlanta campus, began as the pastor of Virginia Highlands Church in Atlanta.² Based on his observations of the community, he decided to lead the church in a progressive direction to allow the church to be more open and welcoming to people of different identities. The church adopted the phrase “an inclusive Community of Faith where everyone is welcome.” The congregation increased in the number of queer members, and queer members and women even took on leadership roles in the church, a significant change for a Southern church in the twentieth century. However, these developments led to the church leaving the Southern Baptist Convention in 1999.³ The church eventually received a letter from the GBC in

1999 stating that they were under investigation for “harboring homosexuals.” The Virginia Highlights Church was then kicked out of the GBC after a vote. Also in 1999, Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia was disfellowshipped from the GBC for the same reasons. Shirley remarked that the two churches and pastors went through this time and process together. Both churches remain progressive and welcoming to LGBTQ+ members today.

¹ “Our Staff,” Eagle River United Church of Christ, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://eagleriverucc.org/about-us/our-staff/>.

² Reverend Tim Shirley, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May, 1 2024.]

³ “Kicked Out of the House: Two Georgia Baptist Churches Find Hope in Expulsion,” Whosoever, August 18, 2020, <https://whosoever.org/kicked-out-of-the-house-two-georgia-baptist-churches-find-hope-in-expulsion/>.

Excerpts from an interview with Reverend Shirley⁴

Before leaving the convention with your church, what was your opinion of the Georgia Baptist Convention?

“Oh I thought it had already gone too far right. It had followed the lead of the Southern Baptist Convention. You know, they used to talk about the fact that state conventions were autonomous. They really weren’t. They were still under the umbrella of the larger denomination. Frankly, by the time our church was kicked out, which we made them do, I told our folks that if this was going to happen, we weren’t going to go away quietly. They were going to have to make a spectacle of themselves. Besides, there’s no such thing as bad publicity. By the time we were disfellowshipped, frankly we were no longer a contributing part of the GBC. We were a member in name only. They could have saved themselves a lot of embarrassment by just removing us from the roles, but they chose not to do that. Like I said, if they wanted to make a public spectacle of themselves, I knew how that would play out. I was all for it.”

What was the relationship [between Virginia Highlands and the GBC] like? Were there donations to the convention or students to certain colleges?

“When I went there in 1990 it was called the Virginia Avenue (?) Baptist Church. It had a strong history with the Southern Baptist Convention, the GBC, and the Atlanta Baptist Association. It was a loyal, contributing member in every way. So the amazing part of my ministry at this church was how quickly we were able to unravel all of those denominational ties. We actually, and we didn’t do any publicity around this, but we chose to leave the SBC in 1992 and didn’t bother with the GBC...”

Did you lose any kind of financial support or members of the church when you were kicked out of the convention?

“By the time this happened, our church was solidly welcoming and affirming so no really we didn’t lose any individuals, we picked up some. We didn’t lose any financial support. As you know, the way the system used to work, churches gave money to the denomination, not the other way around. So no, it was all a bonus for us.”

**Read the rest of Revered Tim Shirley’s Interview in the
continuation piece ‘The Treatment of us’**

Watch this interview conducted by Virginia-Highland Church:
https://youtu.be/Tiv0M6gnBkc?si=_M29R7RmNxXrSFqf

⁴ Revered Tim Shirley, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May, 1 2024.]

Shorter University V. Georgia Baptist Convention

As of the publication of this work Shorter University is not affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC)



Now known as Shorter University, this institution, much like Mercer University, was under the organizational control of the Georgia Baptist Convention. It was founded in 1873 as the Cherokee Baptist Female College, an all women's college. In the 1950s the college admitted its first male students and renamed itself Shorter College in honor of highly contributing donors. In 1958 the college's selection process for the trustee was given to the GBC, and new faculty was hired along with new plans to construct an administration building, dorms, libraries, and more amenities for the institution. Now a co-education institution of the college throughout the 1960s and 70s, Shorter was considered more conservative than their Baptist college counterparts due to the amount of dictating by the

GBC to maintain a certain image of Shorter. Even in comparison to Mercer and other prominent Baptist intuitions, Shorter was viewed as uncomfortably conservative. They often had the same issues as Mercer when it came to their relationship with the GBC, including micromanaging the university and its values. In 2002, Shorter attempted to sever their ties with the GBC. The lawsuit following their attempt to sever reported that by 2001, trustees being elected were solely GBC nominated candidates with no Shorter nominated candidates. Shorter representatives were concerned for their accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) if the college were to stay under the GBC.⁵ Assuming there were contentions similar to those Mercer experienced, there may have been additional issues regarding academic freedom and expression within the school under a Baptist fundamentalist denomination.



In January 2002, the trustees of Shorter College voted to sever ties with the GBC. They agreed to move their assets to a newly created foundation, "Shorter College Foundation" Incorporated.⁶ The total amount of assets to be moved was worth fifty million dollars. At this point, Shorter's relationship with the GBC was 132 years old. The Georgia Baptist

⁵ "Ga. Supreme Court Rules Against Shorter in Dispute with Baptist Convention," Baptist News Global, May 22, 2005, <https://baptistnews.com/article/ga-supreme-court-rules-against-shorter-in-dispute-with-baptist-convention/>.

⁶ *Baptist Convention v. Shorter College*, 266 Ga. App. 312, 596 S.E.2d 761 (Ga. Ct. App. 2004)\

Convention sued Shorter for allegedly violating state regulations with their transfer of funds. For 313 reasons, the Supreme Court of Georgia ruled in favor of the GBC. In its decision, the Court said that the Baptist Convention could not interfere with the college's management. Essentially, the college was allowed to run itself independently even though it was associated with the GBC. It was not until 2011 that Shorter College's association with the GBC ended.⁷

On October 21, 2011 after an annual board of trustees meeting, all in attendance were informed of substantial changes being made at the university.⁸ No more than an hour after the meeting the GBC Board of Trustees and the administration of the college sent out an email containing two new documents faculty and staff were required to sign to remain employed at Shorter College. They were titled "Shorter University Statement of Faith" and "Personal Lifestyle Statement." Faculty and staff were not surprised by this request as the board had slowly been making changes to the university for years, such as a 2010 update of the school motto from "Lux et veritas" (light and truth) to "Transforming Lives Through Christ." In response, eighty-three full-time faculty and staff resigned from their positions, which included four deans and the vice president of the university.

Tenured librarian Michael Wilson was openly gay and worked at Shorter for fourteen years. He looked for other employment options but was unsuccessful, so he signed the faith agreement but crossed out the line stating "I reject as acceptable all sexual activity not in agreement with the Bible, including but not limited to premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality." He received a response from the board shortly after in which they said, "Shorter hereby accepts your resignation effective May 31, 2012. We wish you the best of luck in the future."⁹ Those who remained and signed the agreements felt trapped in the institution they had once loved and adored.

In mid-April 2011, faculty, staff and students protested the new agreements and stood outside the university in rain and cold to protest the anti-LGBT clauses and the requirements to sign the documents. Some held signs stating "Education not Indoctrination."¹⁰ Incredibly, the whole history of this dilemma and controversy at Shorter was well archived by these concerned Shorter supporters in 2011. The website is still active to this day and we encourage you to view the material and videos from the days of protesting. The website contains an immense amount of articles written during the 2011-2012 academic year, numerous original documents including the agreement forms and survey questionnaire and results, and many comments from the time that share the various opinions of Shorter supporters and those who supported the new agreement forms. Check it all out at <https://saveourshorter.com>.

⁷ Libby A. Nelson, "Shorter's Exodus, a Year Later," *Inside Higher Ed*, Nov. 13, 2012, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/11/14/cultural-change-tears-georgia-baptist-college-apart>.

⁸ "Organizer: About 200 Join Protest Over Anti-gay Shorter University Policy," *The Georgia Voice* (Atlanta, Georgia), Nov. 11, 2011, <https://thegavoice.com/news/georgia/organizer-about-200-join-protest-over-anti-gay-shorter-university-policy/>.

⁹ Inside Higher Ed. "Cultural Change Tears Georgia Baptist College Apart." November 14, 2012. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/11/14/cultural-change-tears-georgia-baptist-college-apart>.

¹⁰ Saveourshorter. "What Would You Do?" Save Our Shorter, April 25, 2012, <https://saveourshorter.com/2012/04/>.

Shorter University Statement of Faith¹¹

A. The Bible

We believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the inerrant and infallible Word of God. It was given by inspiration of God and is the only certain and authoritative rule of every aspect of the Christian life.

B. The Trinity

We believe there is only one true and living God. The triune God is manifested as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In all things, we owe Him alone the highest love, reverence, and obedience. Members of the Trinity have distinct individual attributes, but without division of essence, character, nature, or being.

C. God the Father

We believe there is only one God, who created, preserves, and rules over the universe. The historical account of creation found in Genesis declares that God is the personal and direct Creator of all that exists, including the first humans Adam and Eve, from whom all human beings have come.

D. God the Son: Jesus Christ

We believe Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity and is the eternal Son of God. Conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, Jesus lived a sinless life, perfectly revealing and doing the will of God. His substitutionary atonement on the cross made provision for the redemption of sinful humanity. He was crucified and rose on the third day and ascended to the Father. He alone is sufficient as Savior and rules as Sovereign of the universe. He sits at the right hand of the Father making intercession for believers, and He is the only mediator between God and humanity. In Him “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9 NKJV) and He is “over all, the eternally blessed God” (Romans 9:5 NKJV).

E. Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and is fully divine. He convicts individuals of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and He enables believers to comprehend God’s truth as revealed in Scripture. He indwells and empowers believers for godly service, for worship, and for witness.

F. Humanity

We believe God originally created human beings in His own image, and Adam and Eve were created in perfection. Through Satan’s temptation, they fell from their original perfection into sin. All humans are sinners, fall short of God’s standard of perfection, and are consequently under God’s condemnation. The only remedy for sin is personal salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ, wholly apart from human merit and works.

¹¹ “Documents.” Save Our Shorter, accessed Aug. 22, 2024, <https://saveourshorter.com/documents/>.

G. Salvation

We believe that salvation involves the redemption of the whole person and is offered as a free gift to all who accept Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior by repentance and faith alone. Salvation is entirely of God's grace and cannot be achieved through any human work. To be effective, however, it must be appropriated by the God-given free choice of individuals apart from any human merit or effort. Salvation is not possible apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ, and those who die without receiving Jesus as Savior go into everlasting torment and eternal separation from a loving God.

H. The Church

We believe that Jesus Christ is Head of the church, comprised of all true believers in Him. Christians are to associate themselves as members of local churches and to serve Jesus Christ faithfully in carrying out the Great Commission. Each church has the authority and right from Jesus Christ to govern itself and to administer order, to worship, and to carry out its various ministries.

I. Evangelism and Missions

We believe that it is the privilege and duty of all believers to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ personally and by all methods in harmony with Holy Scripture. A Christ-centered education includes the ongoing integration of biblical faith into every academic discipline of the University. All subject matter is to be approached, presented, and evaluated from a biblical worldview.

J. Last Things

In accord with biblical prophecy, we believe that God will bring the world to its appropriate end, that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth, that the dead will be raised, and that Christ will judge all humanity in righteousness. Unbelievers will be consigned to the place of everlasting punishment, while the redeemed in their resurrected and glorified bodies will dwell forever with the Lord in Heaven.

K. Life of the Believer

We believe that Christians should be consistent with Scripture in their character and in their conduct. We believe that the Bible is our supreme authority and that it provides the moral and ethical principles for personal conduct within and outside the academic community.

Personal Lifestyle Statement¹²

A. Christian Commitment and Membership in a Local Church**

Shorter University will hire persons who are committed Bible-believing Christians, dedicated to integrating biblical faith into their classes, and in agreement with the University Statement of Faith. Moreover, employees are expected to be active members of a local church.

B. Principles of Personal Conduct

I agree to adhere to and support the following principles (on or off the campus):

1. I will be loyal to the mission of Shorter University as a Christ-centered institution affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention.
2. I will not engage in the use, sale, possession, or production of illegal drugs.
3. I reject as acceptable all sexual activity not in agreement with the Bible, including but not limited to premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality.
4. I will not use alcoholic beverages in the presence of students, and I will abstain from serving, using, or advocating the use of alcoholic beverages in public (e.g., in locations open to use by the general public, including restaurants, concert venues, stadiums, and sports facilities) and in settings where students are present or likely to be present. I will not attend any University-sponsored event if I have consumed alcohol within the last six hours. Neither will I promote or encourage the use of alcohol.

I have read and agree with the Personal Lifestyle Statement and will adhere to it in its entirety while employed at Shorter University. I understand that failure to adhere to this statement may result in disciplinary action against me, up to and including immediate termination.

¹² "Documents." Save Our Shorter, accessed Aug. 22, 2024, <https://saveourshorter.com/documents/>.

BAPTISTS*Continued from 1A*

issues that drive most family disputes: money, faith, politics, power and sometimes sex. And they have changed the face of academia in the Southeast.

William Brackney, director of Baylor's Baptist Studies Program, says, "One of the largest denominational empires in higher education has been disintegrating rapidly in the last decade and a half."

GROWING CONFLICT

Baptist colleges cutting their religious ties is nothing new, says Brackney, a professor of religion.

More than 400 colleges and universities nationwide have had Baptist ties at some point in their histories, he said.

Schools like Brown University, the University of Chicago and George Washington University were all founded as Baptist seminaries but gradually lost that identity and finally cut the ties early in the last century.

But that process has speeded up in the past quarter century, say Baptist scholars, since conservatives took control of the national Southern Baptist Convention. That umbrella group represents the estimated 16 million believers.

Bill Leonard, dean of Wake Forest's school of divinity, said, "It's taken these 25 to 30 years for

Baptist colleges and universities**MERCER UNIVERSITY****Founded:** 1833**Location:** Macon**Undergraduate student body:** 4,528**Status:** Georgia Baptist Convention voted Tuesday to sever ties. The split would become final if next year's convention approves a second resolution.**How it describes itself:** "Mercer University is a church-related institution of higher learning ... guided by the historic principles of religious and intellectual freedom, while affirming religious and moral values that arise from the Judeo-Christian understanding of the world."**BAYLOR UNIVERSITY****Founded:** Chartered in 1845 by the Republic of Texas**Location:** Waco, Texas**Undergraduate student body:** 11,580**Status:** Still gets funding from Texas Southern Baptist Convention, but changed its charter in 1990 to give regents greater control over the selection of its governing board.**How it describes itself:** "The largest Baptist university in the world"**WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY****Founded:** 1834**Location:** Winston-Salem, N.C.**Undergraduate student body:** 4,128**Status:** State Baptist convention severed final ties in 2001.**How it describes itself:** "A private, coeducational institution"**BELMONT UNIVERSITY****Founded:** 1890**Location:** Nashville, Tenn.**Undergraduate student body:** 3,317**Status:** Currently ending ties with Tennessee Baptist Convention.**How it describes itself:** "A private, coeducational, comprehensive university related to the Tennessee Baptist Convention"**UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND****Founded:** 1830**Location:** Richmond, Va.**FURMAN UNIVERSITY****Founded:** 1826**Location:** Greenville, S.C.**Undergraduate student body:** 2,807**Status:** South Carolina Baptist Convention voted in 1992 to sever all ties.**How it describes itself:** "An independent, coeducational, liberal arts college"**SAMFORD UNIVERSITY****Founded:** 1841**Location:** Birmingham, Ala.**Undergraduate student body:** 2,586**Status:** Still receives funding from Alabama Baptist Convention.**How it describes itself:** "Samford University is a Christian community focused on student learning. Samford was founded in 1841 by Alabama Baptists."**STETSON UNIVERSITY****Founded:** 1883**Location:** Deland, Fla.**Undergraduate student body:** 2,230**Status:** Stetson and the Florida Baptist Convention severed ties in 1993.**How it describes itself:** "Stetson has had an historical relationship with the Christian community and Baptist denomination."**GEORGETOWN COLLEGE****Founded:** 1787**Location:** Georgetown, Ky.**Undergraduate student body:** 1,334**Status:** Kentucky Baptist Convention voted Nov. 15 to let the college govern itself, and to gradually reduce its funding.**How it describes itself:** "A small, residential, co-educational liberal arts college distinguished by a combination of respected, rigorous undergraduate and graduate programs, an array of opportunities for involvement and leadership, a commitment to Christian values and its distinctive heritage."**SHORTER COLLEGE****Founded:** 1873**Location:** Rome

Mercer's split with the GBC was not an isolated event among universities under the GBC or other state Christian conventions. A trend of these colleges severing their convention increased in the 1990s to 2006. Mercer was one of the later universities to split its ties, with some universities severing as early as 1990.⁸⁶

¹³ "Baptist Colleges and Universities". November 20 2005, Macon Telegraph, Macon, Ga, [Subject Folder]: "Mercer Triangle Symposium - 2005" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.



The Mercer Triangle Symposium and Mercer: The GBC 2005

While tensions between the Georgia Baptist Convention and Mercer University rose over the course of their relationship, the breaking point for this partnership occurred in 2005 when the Mercer Triangle Symposium, which identified itself as Mercer's gay-straight alliance, held a Coming Out Day event on campus. This attracted the attention of the GBC and not long after, the GBC cut ties with Mercer University. While many other issues were cited as the reason for the split, it is believed that the existence of the Mercer Triangle Symposium on campus was what finally pushed the GBC to initiate the severance.

Important Figures

April Trussell-Smith

Trussell-Smith was the president of the Mercer Triangle Symposium during the 2005 split between the Georgia Baptist Convention and Mercer.¹ She currently lives in Valparaiso, Indiana with her husband Tim Smith (also a Mercer alumn) and their two children. After graduating from Mercer, she received her master's degree in English and American Literature from Brandeis University. She also taught English at Georgia Military College for a period of time and is now a high school English teacher.



Beth Sherouse & April Trussell

Dr. G. Elizabeth Sherouse

Sherouse was one of the founders of MTS in 2002.³ She currently lives in Atlanta where she works at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the HIV prevention sector as a contractor. Prior to this, she received both her master's degree and PhD in U.S. history from the University of South Carolina and worked in other areas, such as fundraising writing at Emory University.



Dr. Sherouse speaking to Dr. Pearson (2005)

¹ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]

² "We Are Mercer" Rally, photographs November 18, 2005 donated by Mary Alice Morgan

³ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

Dr. Mary Alice Morgan

Morgan was the advisor of the Mercer Triangle Symposium.⁴ She received her undergraduate degree in English from Duke University and attended graduate school at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She worked in higher education for forty-five years, twenty-eight of which were at Mercer, before retiring in 2024.



Dr. Morgan recording the rally (2005)

Alex Morrison

Morrison was the editor in chief of *The Mercer Cluster* in 2005.⁶ He reported on different MTS events during this time, such as the Coming Out Day Event, and spoke at the “We Are Mercer” Rally. After graduating, he went on to earn his Master’s Degree in public administration from the University of Georgia. He currently still lives in Macon and works as the Executive Director at Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority.



Morrison giving his speech (2005)⁷

⁴ Mary Alice Morgan interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May 1, 2024.]

⁵ “We Are Mercer” Rally, photographs November 18, 2005 donated by Mary Alice Morgan

⁶ Alex Morrison interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 19, 2024.]

⁷ “We Are Mercer” Rally, photographs November 18, 2005 donated by Mary Alice Morgan

Dr. Mary Ann Drake

Drake was a professor at Mercer University and oversaw MTS with Dr. Morgan. We reached out to her for an interview but did not receive a response. We are looking forward to a response and interview in the future.

Timothy Durski

Durski was a student at Mercer in 2005 who was active in the Baptist Student Union and wrote and spoke the closing prayer at the “We Are Mercer” rally.⁸ After graduating, he spent time working at Macon’s Habitat for Humanity Affiliate, earned his Master’s Degree in education, and taught high school English in Macon. Now, he works at a Church in Atlanta in the area of non-profit marketing and communications.



Tim Durski giving his speech (2005)⁹

⁸ Timothy Durski interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 17, 2024.]

⁹ “We Are Mercer” Rally, photographs November 18, 2005 donated by Mary Alice Morgan



Mercer Triangle Symposium

The Founding of the Mercer Triangle Symposium

The Mercer Triangle Symposium (MTS) was founded on October 7, 2002 and referred to itself as the “GLBT Rights Organization” at Mercer University.¹⁰ Their goal was to provide a space where discussions related to sexuality could occur. On its website, both Protect Equality, which was “Mercer Law School GLBT Rights Organization,” and Mercer’s Women’s and Gender Studies Department were linked.

According to Dr. G. Beth Sherouse, a Mercer University alumna, the club idea first originated in the fall of 2002 from two of her fellow students who approached her asking for help starting a gay-straight alliance at Mercer.¹¹ Sherouse is bisexual and had experience in student organizing on campus as she was involved in multiple progressive organizations and was editor-in-chief of *The Cluster*. She agreed to help but told them that she would take more of a backseat role in the club due to her busy schedule. Those two original students also came up with the name of the club: The Mercer Triangle Symposium. According to Sherouse, the name came from Plato’s *Symposium* and was meant to symbolize “a discussion of ideas, a space for dialogue.” The triangle was a reference to the Second World War and the Nazi oppression of homosexuals. Sherouse stated there also may have been thought given to wanting it to not clearly be a gay-straight alliance.

“I think there probably was a sense in which we didn’t want it to be, like, Mercer Gay Straight Alliance . . . Like, I think there was a sense in which, you know, we thought it might be a little more subtle and thus draw a little bit less fire. You know, because the trustee can’t read the list of student organizations and immediately be like, oh, that’s a gay one,” stated Sherouse.¹²

In order to gauge interest levels, these three students stood on the quad asking students whether or not they would be interested in a group on campus supporting gay rights and had them add their names to an interest list if they were.¹³ They were met with a lot of interest from the student body. While there were very few out-queer people on campus at the time, Sherouse explained that there was a lot of interest from straight people on campus who were supportive of the queer community. Eventually, they asked the

¹⁰ Gerald Harris, “Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists,” *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

¹¹ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

¹² G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

¹³ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

Student Government Association (SGA) for recognition of the organization, and the SGA “enthusiastically approved,” with only two students voting no.

“I remember that there were only two no votes in the whole SGA, which we thought was kinda great,” stated Sherouse, “Like, we thought it was amazing that there weren’t more people who objected. So there was overwhelming support from the student government. You know, it did not narrowly get approved. It got enthusiastically approved by the student government.”¹⁴

Not long after the organization received SGA recognition, however, both of the students who originally came up with the idea for MTS had to step down due to personal reasons, which left Beth Sherouse and her friend, Rebecca Drummond, one of the few openly queer people on campus, to take over as leaders of the club.¹⁵ Thus in the spring of 2003, with Dr. Mary Alice Morgan as the club’s advisor, Sherouse and Drummond began programming for the club and hosting meetings and events. However, Drummond had to step down as co-president of MTS, so Sherouse ran the organization, along with Mercer’s chapter of the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (FMLA) which had also just been formed, by herself. After the initial interest in the organization faded, fewer people began attending meetings. Sherouse continued to plan meetings and events, with some having decent attendance, such as an event focusing on sexual health and wellness (in collaboration with FMLA) and one focusing on the Bible and homosexuality. However, overall attendance at meetings especially remained low. Eventually, though, the club fell “dormant,” according to Sherouse.

“Like, I just couldn’t keep it up,” stated Sherouse, “and there wasn’t really there wasn’t really any interest among, you know, the folks in the classes behind me to keep it going. And like I say, I mean, like, sure, there were a lot of folks who were very supportive, but there were not a lot of out queer people.”¹⁶

Beth Sherouse later stepped down as president due to the low activity and personal circumstances. April Trussell, now April Trussell-Smith, a straight-identifying Mercer student, took on the role after being asked by Dr. Morgan.

When asked about her stepping into the role as president, Trussell-Smith stated, “I think Dr. Morgan was the adviser for both FMLA and MTS, and she needed a president. And so, she just asked if I’d be willing, and I told her, sure . . . She was like, it’s a really small club. It’s basically the same people who are in FMLA, and, actually, some of the FMLA people don’t even stay. I mean, like I said, I don’t know what it was meant to be when it started, and I don’t know how, active or what they had done previously. But I think by the time I stepped in, it was really just a gay straight alliance in the, like, traditional sense of being a place that people who, supported the full inclusion of, LGBTQ + folks could come and be in the same room together. Right? So, it was really just holding space. And so I was like, sure. I can do that.”¹⁷

¹⁴ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

¹⁵ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

¹⁶ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

¹⁷ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]

Morgan, reflecting on this time, stated, “I mean, she was at a point in her life where she was feeling, I think she would say this is accurate, she could no longer tolerate the kind of discrimination she was seeing. She was reevaluating the very conservative Baptist upbringing that she had had. And so the discrimination not only surrounding gender but also sexuality, you know, it was really troubling. It was kind of a crisis of conscience. What was she gonna stand up for? . . . Part of the kind of cultural reevaluation that was going on. The equity for marriage movement was one of the central I mean, in addition to, of course, campus climate.”¹⁸

Meeting attendance remained low, with only about four or five people on average attending meetings according to Trussell-Smith and Morgan. “It depended on what we were doing at the time. Since we had sort of collaborative meetings of FMLA and and, MTS, When it was the dual meetings, obviously, the attendance went up . . . When it was, you know, just MTS, it was a smaller group, but included students who weren’t really part of FMLA as well. So there was some, you know, like two subsets in an overlap,” stated Morgan¹⁹

¹⁸ Mary Alice Morgan interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May 1, 2024.]

¹⁹ Mary Alice Morgan interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May 1, 2024.]

Forum faces gay rights issues

By Emily Hill
FEATURES EDITOR
emily.ann.hill

A woman was raped by police officer in Barrow County, Josh Mason said. The victim was raped because she was a lesbian. On October 11th, Mason sat the front of the Stetson lecture hall, along with three other panelists for the National Coming Out Day Educational Forum, hosted by Mercer Triangle Symposium. Students and staff filled every row so that some had to sit in the aisles.

The forum confronted the serious issues of being homosexual in today's society. Panelist and Macon community member Ashley Preston asked the audience to imagine being unable to hold your partner's hand in public. Chris Grant, panel member and Mercer political science professor, said, "In public, you have to hide your affection, for fear of the sociological affects." Grant described a scene where a mother covered the eyes of her children in front of a gay couple. That reaction, he said, was ridiculous. Exposure to homosexuality "is not going to make your kids gay," Grant said.

The fear of homosexuality stems from unawareness, said panelist Rachel Williams, a second-year Mercer law student. Many people are disconnected from the gay community, and never know a gay person personally, Williams said. It is easier to hold prejudices and hatred toward a group of people if you never understand who they are as a person. That is why hate crimes such as the Barrow County rape happen, she said. "We are all human," Preston said. "We all deserve to live equally."

However, homosexuals are not able to live their lives equally, the panel argued. Heterosexual privilege, the advantages of everyday life that most heterosexuals take for granted, is a major battle, they said. At a job interview, candidates who are straight do not have to wonder whether their sexual orientation will cause them to lose the job. When checking into a hotel, a heterosexual couple is never asked if they need two twin beds. Health insurance provides coverage for a heterosexual's wife or husband on the same plan, but does give the same coverage to gay couples.

At Mercer, a wife or husband of a straight employee is awarded free tuition, but does not allow a staff member's gay partner free attendance. Heterosexual privilege is apparent in Mercer's legal policies also. In *The Law*, Mercer's student policy handbook, the Equal Opportunity clause says that, "Mercer is committed to providing equal opportunity for all students...without discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability." The nondiscrimination clause does not include sexual orientation. Examples like these are everywhere, the panelists said.

Continued on Features, page 5



Photo from *The Cluster*, MTS

Students and faculty gathered in Stetson to view the Coming Out Day forum held by MTS. All were asked to sign a petition (printed in the last issue of *The Cluster*) to show their support of this minority group. MTS will host more forums this year as a means to raise awareness of those subjugated.

Walt Whitman (American poet), Virginia Woolf (British novelist and essayist), James Baldwin (African American novelist and essayist), Barney Frank (House of Representatives, Mass.), Alan Turing (mathematician and pioneering computer scientist), Rudolf Nureyev (Russian dancer), and Martina Navratilova (tennis champion). These are just a few of the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered (GLBT) individuals who have contributed to the arts, sciences, politics, and sports throughout history. We, the undersigned, value equally the GLBT students, faculty, and staff members at Mercer who bring their gifts to our campus and add to the richness and diversity of our intellectual community.

Mary Ann Drake
Erin Porter

Your name here
April Trussell

Mary Alice Morgan
Your name here

National Coming Out Day 2005

It was during Trussell-Smith's time as president that MTS sponsored Mercer's first Coming Out Day. National Coming Out Day began in 1988 after a March on Washington in 1987.^{20, 21, 22} It was meant to serve as a way to combat stigma surrounding LGBT individuals in order to better create an environment in which more people felt comfortable coming out. Mercer University had its first Coming Out Day on October 11, 2005. As a part of Coming Out Day, MTS purchased an ad in *The Mercer Cluster* that included a statement of support for LGBT students, faculty, and staff at Mercer, as well as a place for the names of supporters. An email about this ad, including information about how one's name could be included, was sent out on October 10, 2005 and the ad itself was published in the October 13, 2005 issue of *The Cluster*.^{23, 24} Twenty-nine names of faculty and staff were listed as supporters in *The Cluster*, including professor of Christianity Dr. Margaret Dee Bratcher and assistant professor of Christianity Dr. Jannell Johnson.

Morgan and the other leaders of MTS asked Alex Morrison, editor-in-chief of *The Cluster*, to publish this ad in the paper and he agreed, also allowing the ad to be published without the usual standard fees, as he felt that it was news more than it was an ad.

²⁰ Gerald Harris, "Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists," *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

²¹ Emily Hill, "Forum faces gay rights issues," *The Cluster*, Oct. 27, 2005.

²² Mercer Triangle Symposium, page 21. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

²³ Gerald Harris, "Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists," *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

²⁴ MS-TS-2005, page 1. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

On Coming Out Day, October 11, 2005, an educational forum took place in front of Stetson Hall on Mercer University's Macon campus.²⁵ The Mercer Triangle Symposium hosted in collaboration with Project Equality at Mercer Law. This event had four panelists, including Josh Mason (co-executive director of Project Equality), Ashley Preston, and Rachel Williams, who were all Mercer Law students, and Chris Grant, a Mercer political science professor. According to Trussell-Smith, the event hosts sought undergraduate student panelists but were unable to find anyone willing to participate. The panelists discussed various topics related to sexuality, including lack of awareness, fear, coming out, religious pushback, and more. Trussell-Smith considered the panel a success. The Coming Out Day event had a high attendance, and a *Cluster* article even described that people had to sit on the floor because there were not enough chairs for the number of people in attendance. However, while the event was well-attended, MTS did receive pushback from those in opposition to their cause through emails prior to the event.²⁶

²⁵ Emily Hill, "Forum faces gay rights issues," *The Cluster*, Oct. 27, 2005.

²⁶ Project Equality email, Josh Mason to all, October 27th, 2005, donated by Mary Alice Morgan

...to learn
...to be an ally
...to create an inclusive Mercer Community

National Coming Out Day Forum

Monday, October 10, 7:00 P.M.—8:00 P.M.

Stetson 251

Panel Discussion:

- ▣ How is life different for LGBT Mercerians?
- ▣ What is heterosexual privilege?
- ▣ What steps could Mercer take to be a more welcoming community?

Featuring three LGBT Mercer Law students and a
CLA faculty member.

Would you like to show your support for gay rights
and Mercer's LGBT students, faculty, and staff? See

Sponsored by:



Mercer Triangle
Symposium

Mercer Triangle Symposium,
The Women's & Gender Studies Program
Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance

The Women's and Gender Studies Program
Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance

Dear Middle Georgia lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights advocate:

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Josh Mason, and I am the Co-Executive Director of Project Equality, an organization dedicated to educating and advocating on behalf of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Macon and surrounding counties. Project Equality is based at the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University in Macon. We currently have over 65 active members who are dedicated to advancing equality for all Americans.

I am contacting you to seek your support, guidance and involvement in creating a successful LGBT local advocacy organization designed to combat state-wide anti-LGBT policies and work for social progress in Macon, surrounding counties as well as throughout Georgia

This is a crucial time for those who support gay rights. As you may know, many initiatives are being planned to further entrench discrimination and inequality into our state including a ballot initiative to ban gay adoption, a ban on allowing LGBT foster parents and the requirement of parental notification and signed permission slips for students aimed at silencing LGBT youth.

We cannot afford as a community to sit and allow neo-conservative Georgians to hijack our community and our families in attempt to once again use us for political gain. It seems every year there is more to defend and more to loose than we ever knew was possible.

Many of you worked tirelessly to change people's attitudes one person at a time during the marriage fight. And to you, I applaud your conviction and courage. But quite frankly, many in our community decided to sit the last battle out because it seemed very unlikely from the outset we could win. Part of the apathy was because we as a state-wide community were not organized. We were not funded. We failed to have a coherent message that resonated with voters. And, we failed as a community to effectively challenge the hate, bigotry, fear and ignorance that ultimately prevailed on election day.

We cannot make those mistakes again.

It is time we methodically and competently challenge those who challenge us- not in an abrasive or aggressive manner, but in a way that shatters each baseless accusation and lie and leaves the undeniable TRUTH for all to see.

Honestly, we may not win the fights at the ballot box or in the state legislature, but we can undoubtedly educate the public to be critical consumers of the supposed morals and beliefs they are being fed by gay rights opponents. Once people are challenged as to why they hold the belief they do, more will come to recognize the illogic and disconnect that is the basis of their anti-gay attitudes.

Also, this community's presence alone during these conflicts will dramatically alter people's perceptions and beliefs of the LGBT community. Knowledge and awareness dispel ignorance and fear of the unknown- two of the biggest causes of intolerance.

But, we cannot change opinions without a coherent plan and the energy to implement success.

We need your help. Project Equality is seeking to create a coalition of organizations and people who share the same desire to challenge ignorance and defeat bigotry. Project Equality will be meeting starting this month to begin creating a lobbying campaign to persuade local state senators and

representatives in Middle Georgia to stand up for equality when the time arrives. Also, we will begin designing a public relations campaign to challenge specific policies targeting our community and our families. In addition, Project Equality will be working to achieve true workplace equality in Macon, Bibb County and at Mercer University.

Finally, it is time that our state-wide community acts with the diligence, discipline and competence that is the hallmark of our opposition. We can't afford not to.

Please join or financially contribute to Project Equality to begin the next chapter in the fight for equality.

If you would like to continue to receive Project Equality e-mails, would like to make a donation, or would like more information about this organization, please contact me at 404-610-8195 or via e-mail at joshmason@bellsouth.net

Sincerely,
Josh Mason

****Please forward to all supporters you may know.**

Gay organization at Mercer disbands

By JOHN BLAKE
jblake@ajc.com

A support group for gay students at the Macon campus of Mercer University disbanded Monday after the head of the Georgia Baptist Convention complained to school officials that the group's existence betrayed the university's Christian heritage.

The Mercer Triangle Symposium, the school's first gay student group, held its final meeting Monday, said Beth Sherouse, its former president. She said she could not comment on the reasons.

Nancy David, president of the school's student government, said about 50 people, including students, faculty and administrators, attended the meeting to show support. "There is a lot more to it than we're allowed to talk about," David said.

Mercer's student Senate first recognized the group in 2002.

Monday was the first day of the annual Georgia Baptist Convention in Columbus.

Last month, the GBC's executive director, J. Robert White, publicly complained about the gay group after learning about it

in a campus newspaper. White said he received calls from parents around Georgia who were concerned about the education their children were receiving.

Mercer, which also has a campus in Atlanta, is a Baptist-affiliated college of 7,000 students that receives about \$2.4 million a year from the Georgia Baptist Convention.

White declined to talk about the Triangle Symposium's demise Monday, but he told the Baptist Press, the official newspaper of the Southern Baptist Convention, that Mercer's administration gave tacit approval to the group by letting it meet on campus.

"If there was no spiritual reason whatsoever to discourage homosexuality, certainly the blight of AIDS should be adequate to surmise, 'This is not a good thing to promote at our university,'" White told the Baptist Press last week.

Mercer President Kirby Godsey's office said he was not available for comment. Godsey told the Baptist Press that Mercer did not sponsor the group but respected its right to exist.

David said the group will resurface. "It's a temporary thing," she said.

GBC Pushback Against MTS

After the event, the Georgia Baptist Convention Executive Director J. Robert White reported being "deeply concerned" about the event.²⁷ He expressed concern over Mercer and the GBC not aligning in their beliefs on how to deal with the situation and about Mercer not falling in line with the image they wanted for Baptist universities. His worries were of parents sending their child to Mercer, believing the university aligns with all of the GBC's values, only to be disappointed. While he recognized that universities are meant to encourage students to think about a wide range of topics, he also believed that a Baptist school still needed to stay true to what he saw as Baptist beliefs and not encourage actions of thoughts that oppose this.²⁸ He reported getting calls from concerned parents as well as people from across the state of Georgia. White also later stated his concern for the well-being of the students on campus due to these events occurring on campus and cited the danger of AIDS as a reason why Mercer should not be supporting homosexuality.^{29 30}

"The thing that concerns me most deeply is the disregard for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of the students by those who promoted this event and other similar activities that apparently take place with regularity on the campus," stated White. "If Mercer says, 'There's nothing we can do about this kind of event taking place at the university,' or 'Students must be free to express themselves without interference from the university,' we still have a serious compatibility problem."³¹

Diane Reasoner, the Communication Specialist for the GBC, stated that she was "deeply troubled," by the support religion professors were showing to the group.³²

Religion professors Dr. Johnson and Dr. Bratcher received a heightened amount of feedback for signing the petition due to their discipline. "I didn't think anything of it, and I signed it," stated Johnson, "Didn't think about the implications of doing that . . . And so the Georgia Baptist Convention, researched and found out that two of us from the Religion Department had signed that statement. And they published in

²⁷ Gerald Harris, "What's up with the Mercer Triangle Symposium," *The Christian Index*, Nov. 10, 2005.

²⁸ Gerald Harris, "Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists," *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

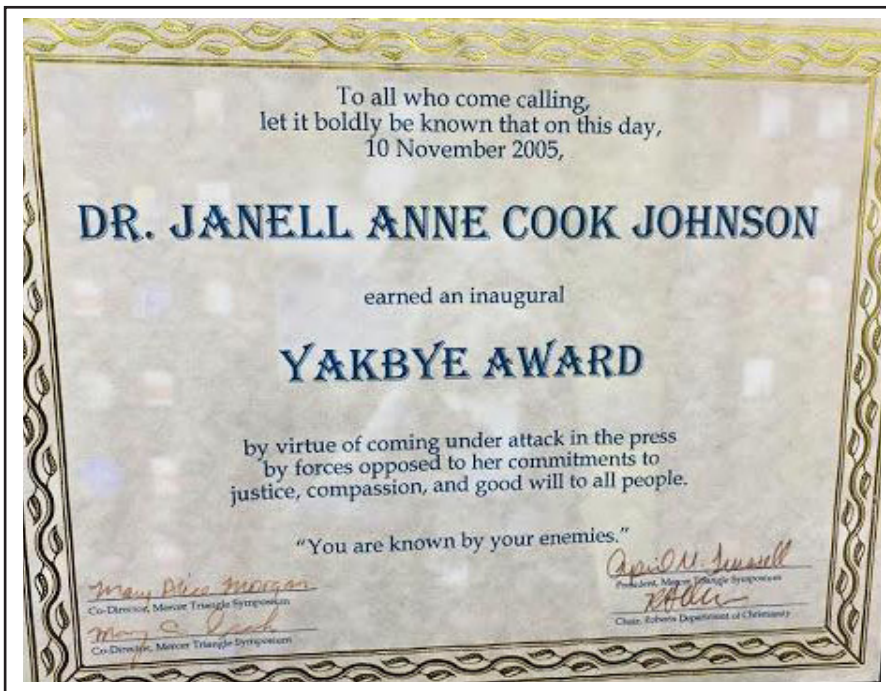
²⁹ John Blake, "Gay organization at Mercer disbands," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, (Atlanta, GA), Nov. 15, 2005.

³⁰ Gerald Harris, "Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists," *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

³¹ Gerald Harris, "Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists," *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

³² Chicago Tribune, "Baptists sever ties with university," *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 25, 2005.

The Christian Index . . . that two religion professors had signed it, and all hell broke loose after that. We had people coming up here, confronting us, asking how we could believe that homosexuality was okay, you know, all of that stuff. And eventually, of course, it blew over. There was some, among faculty . . . There were comments made, not to my face, but I'd heard that they were made that the people who got us in trouble, Dr. Bratcher and myself, should be paying the money that we're gonna lose because of the Georgia Baptist severance. But there were more faculty and students who came out of the woodwork to support us having signed the petition. There were other faculty who signed the petition, but the Georgia Baptist Convention was interested in the Religion Department, because we were teaching students religion."³³



However, Johnson also recalled both her and Bratcher being called to the dean's office later on where they were presented with a "YAKBYE" certificate, which stands for "You Are Known By Your Enemies." Johnson described it as "lovely" and that "they were proud of us for having taken a stand and all that. And it was really sweet."³⁴

Editor of *The Cluster* Alex Morrison, who ran the original petition, recalled how he remained tied to the MTS contention. He recalled, "Maybe the next week later, I get a call from

somebody who . . . just gave me their name and that they were an alumni and asked for me to mail them, two copies of that edition of *The Cluster*. Okay. I wasn't thinking anything of it. So I did . . . And then the next issue of *The Christian Index* came out . . . And, I picked it up and was like, wow. This is this headline story, the top story of this issue is about me. Like, it's talking about how *The Cluster* ran this petition and, that they had spoken to the editor and, you know, this sort of thing and didn't name didn't name me by name, but, you know, insinuated that, you know, I had made this decision and that it was, you know, indicative of the depravity of Mercer. I'm editorializing there a little bit, but that was that was the gist of it . . . But so then, of course, the the Georgia Baptist Convention annual meeting is nearby, and we find out that this is . . . that Mercer's involvement and inclusion in the Georgia Baptist Convention was very much on the docket. And, they they made it clear that it was this specific issue, not only that this event took place on campus, not only that, we allowed, like, the Mercer Triangle Symposium to be on campus even though it, during this era, it was kicked off of campus and and all of that . . . But that it was this the running of this, petition in in *The Cluster* was a central issue to them, that it that it indicated support on such a level that it meant that the university was too far gone, you know, in their eyes."³⁵

³³ Janell Johnson, interview by Bekehm Mohn & Raven Dupree, Mercer University, [March 27, 2024.]

³⁴ "YAKBYE", November 10, 2005, donated by Janell Johnson

³⁵ Alex Morrison interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 19, 2024.]

Georgia Equality Event on Campus Canceled

At the end of October 2005, MTS and Project Equality at Mercer Law collaborated on an event that would feature a speaker from Georgia Equality to talk about a piece of legislation that would ban queer couples from adopting.³⁶ However, Vice President and Provost of Mercer Dr. Horace Fleming did not allow the event to be held on campus. It later came out that this was a misunderstanding due to a misinterpretation in a *Macon Telegraph* article about the event. The administration at Mercer thought that the event was a Georgia Equality-sponsored event, which would go against the Mercer policy of not allowing sponsored events by organizations affiliated with a specific political party on campus. However, this was not the case and Fleming apologized for the misunderstanding.

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Project Equality Members,

Dean Floyd and Professor Creswell of Mercer Law School received a phone call Thursday afternoon from the Mercer University Provost stating Project Equality was not allowed to host its meeting on campus. No specific reason for the dismissal has been given as of yet. Instead, the meeting was held at the High Street Unitarian Universalist Church at the stated time.

A sense of outrage has been expressed by some Project Equality members; thus, I feel we as a group should meet in order to discuss our course of action. I thought it might be best to meet at the law school so that more people can attend. This is a very serious situation that demands a thoughtful and well articulated response. If you are unable to attend but would like PE to consider your response, please e-mail Josh.

You should know that many law school faculty including the administration and several undergrad faculty members have shown tremendous support for our ability to assemble and have argued in our favor. We truly believe this was a directive from the Mercer Administration not the law school administration.

If you can find time, please meet at the law school student lounge at 2:00 p.m. for a discussion of the situation. If we are a large group, we will move elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the inequality we are working to eradicate might be present in our own backyard. It is situations like this that demands organizations like Project Equality must exist.

Sincerely,
Josh Mason Ashley Preston.

³⁶ Emily Hill, "Miscommunication leads Project Equality/MTS forum off campus," *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 10, 2005.

³⁷ Project Equality email, Josh Mason to all, October 27th, 2005, donated by Mary Alice Morgan



“I think it was after that that all the parts began to fall,” stated MTS member Erin Porter.³⁸

After Mercer administration blocked the event from occurring on campus, April Trussell-Smith wrote a letter to Fleming expressing her disappointment. In her letter, she listed Mercer’s values and why his action violated those values. She stated that she focused on taking what he had stated his beliefs were and explaining to him why he was not “living up to who [he] said [he] was” rather than going about it in a way that used her own beliefs to explain to him why he was wrong.³⁹

“I mean, what I remember is a flurry of activity, and I remember that I was suddenly having meetings and email exchanges and whatever with these people who are very high up in the organization,” stated Trussell-Smith. “My most memorable exchange with Dr. Fleming . . . I remember him asking me, how many people are

we talking about . . . Because I told him that I was, I guess I said, like, I’m responsible for, I’m responsible for the protection of this club. Right? And for, like, for all the people who are counting on me and who feel marginalized on Mercer’s campus and whatever . . . And as I said to you, we have four or five people at our meetings. But what came to my mind was I have seventy-five on my mailing list, and that’s what I told him. I have seventy-five on my mailing list. And so then he’s thinking we’re a much bigger group than we are. Right? I mean, which, yeah we actually are. That was part of the thing. Right? It was the same reason that you’re having trouble finding people who identified as gay on campus, to talk to that those people were there, and they were interested in what we were doing. And so they were on our email list, but they weren’t public.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Erin Porter, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [February 26, 2024.]

³⁹ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]

⁴⁰ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]



Mercer Triangle Symposium

October 27, 2005

Dr. Horace W. Fleming
Executive Vice President and Provost
Mercer University
1400 Coleman Avenue
Macon, GA 31207

Dear Dr. Fleming:

I am writing to you in my role as the President of Mercer's undergraduate gay-straight alliance, Mercer Triangle Symposium (MTS). I regret that we have not yet met. And, I regret even more that the occasion of my writing to you is not to thank you for your support of MTS's National Coming Out Day (NCOD) Educational Forum, but to respond to Mercer Law School's Project Equality having been barred from their meeting featuring a guest speaker from Georgia Equality on campus on Thursday, October 20. I *do* thank you for supporting our initiative in sponsoring the NCOD Forum. Therefore, it is with heavy heart, on behalf of not only MTS but all student organizations whose freedom to associate was put in jeopardy last Thursday, that I write to you.

In your original support of the NCOD Forum, you affirmed the principles of a "Community of Respect" listed in the *Student Code of Conduct* (www2.mercer.edu/StudentAffairs/JShandbook.htm):

The *Community of Respect* ensures certain rights of its members. The university values the following student rights:

- A. Free inquiry, expression, and assembly as long as conducted in a manner that does not infringe upon the rights of others.[...]
- D. Freedom to pursue educational goals, the right to the free exchange of ideas, thoughts, and viewpoints.
- E. Freedom of association for students who meet the university's standards for participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

Sadly, in canceling Project Equality's room reservation and forcing them to find a meeting space off Campus, you contradicted the spirit of these principles and have, however inadvertently, created an atmosphere of disrespect and a chilly climate for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered (GLBT) people and their straight friends on Mercer's campus.

I write to you as one of the students affected by this decision, having attended both the Project Equality meeting on Thursday, October 20, and the Law School meeting at which you explained the administration's actions. While I understand the time constraints under which you were operating and Mercer's need to verify the legitimacy of invited groups on campus, I feel that the haste with which this action was taken and the fact that the decision was made before anyone from Project Equality was contacted betrays a fundamental disrespect for the goals of Project Equality and by extension MTS and any campus group whose educational mission invites controversy. In the past, Mercer and President Godsey have shown great courage and integrity in their support of a gay-straight alliance on campus. In this decision, I fear that Mercer failed to live up to the courage for which it has been known in the past. This is a failure that leaves me as a Mercerian deeply saddened.

Please understand that I write to you also as a student who loves Mercer. In fact, I expressed my love of Mercer publicly in a "letter to the editor" that was published in the October 10, 2005, issue of *The Cluster*. That letter read, in part, "I love to get on the soapbox of Mercer love, and, if you ask me why I love Mercer, I'll talk your ear off about the integration of faith and learning and the history and importance of a liberal arts tradition." I am a triple major in the College of Liberal Arts: Christianity, English, and Women's and Gender Studies. My years and studies at Mercer have given me a sense of the responsibility to think critically about the world, the necessity to live with integrity and vision, and the drive to find and embrace my vocation. It is precisely *because* of my love for Mercer and these lessons I have learned from Mercer that I was so disheartened by last Thursday's decision.

On behalf of MTS and, hopefully with the support of other student organizations on campus, I will submit this letter to *The Cluster* for publication in its next issue (to be released November 10). I am sending the letter to you now as a courtesy, to give you the time, if you so choose, to draft your response and submit it by *The Cluster* deadline (November 7 at noon) so that your voice will also be heard.

I know that you are meeting with the presidents of Mercer's student organizations on Tuesday, November 1. I will be attending this roundtable discussion not only in my role as MTS President but also as President of Women of Witness, a service organization for women interested in Christian ministry. The events of Thursday night have placed the autonomy of student organizations in jeopardy, and I hope that we can discuss the implications, for all student organizations, of these events. So that they will be informed ahead of time, I am sending copies of this letter to the presidents of all student organizations.

Finally, because equality in student organizations and the full dignity accorded to all Mercer students—heterosexual as well as GLBT—have been placed in jeopardy and because students should hear an explanation of the administration's actions directly from you, I would like to invite you and our Dean of Students, Dr. Pearson, to address the MTS membership and other interested students at a mutually convenient time in the near future. I look forward to your response; you can contact me at april.m.trussell@student.mercer.edu.

The MTS officers will be happy to meet with you in any setting you wish. We are painfully aware that, for many GLBT individuals, the college years are years of struggle, doubt, and conflict as they try to come to terms with their sexual orientation, with their faith's position on homosexuality, with homophobia, and with fear. In an unwelcoming climate, where they are ostracized and forced to remain closeted, GLBT individuals are two to three times as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to commit suicide. They are also more likely to develop problems with alcohol.

MTS believes that an unwelcoming college climate is perpetuated by misinformation and can be addressed at Mercer through educational initiatives designed to alert students, faculty, staff, and administration as well as the greater Macon community to the existence and pervasiveness of homophobia and heterosexual privilege. We are dedicated to combating problems associated with being GLBT at college by fostering a community of respect "where everyone is held in mutual high regard [and where,] because every human being is created in the image of God, each person deserves to be treated with respect and civility" (www2.mercer.edu/StudentAffairs/JShandbook.htm).

Sincerely,

April Michelle Trussell
President, Mercer Triangle Symposium

cc: President R. Kirby Godsey, Dr. Douglas R. Pearson, Mercer Triangle Symposium Members, MTS Advisors: Dr. Mary Alice Morgan and Dr. Mary Ann Drake, Cluster Editor, Student Organization Presidents

⁴¹ Email from April Trussell to Dr. Fleming, October 27th, 2005, donated by Mary Alice Morgan

Mercer Administration and Faculty Attitudes During this Time

According to *The Christian Index*, Godsey, alongside other administration met in the office of *The Christian Index* and stated that he did not agree with and discouraged MTS calling the event “coming out day.”⁴² Specifically, the article stated, “He said he understood the meeting was to encourage open dialogue about homosexuality rather than offer a venue for declaring one’s sexual preference . . . The Mercer president said there probably were homosexual students at the university, but the percentage was likely no greater than that of the general population.”

“The Mercer Triangle Symposium is an organization recognized by the Student Government Association, and though the university does not sponsor this organization, we do respect the right of students to assemble and discuss wide-ranging social and religious issues,” Godsey clarified.⁴³

Morgan described what she felt hearing about the GBC’s response, stating, “It was, I, you know, I anticipated pushback of course, retaliation, condemnation, whatever. I did not anticipate removal of student scholarships. That was a stomach sinks to the bottom of your feet kind of moment.”⁴⁴

However, she also observed how the students and faculty came together during this time, stating, “[The students and faculty were] so supportive of one another. And, I mean, we mobilized so quickly and so easily. Easily isn’t quite the word. We were all on the same page. It was hard during the mobilization, but we were all on the same page. We had each other’s backs. The most heart wrenching, difficult, moments were when Dr. Godsey asked us to disband.”⁴⁵

The Disbandment of the Mercer Triangle Symposium

Unfortunately, MTS received significant attention and pushback from the GBC during this time, leading to the eventual disbandment of the club.⁴⁶ When asked about the decision to disband, Dr. Morgan explained that they felt that is what needed to happen in order to protect Mercer students and protect those with GBC-funded scholarships. On November 3, 2005, the Mercer Triangle Symposium voted to close its website and on November 14, 2005, it held its final meeting and disbanded.^{47 48} No one involved in this decision commented on the reasons behind this at the time, but it was assumed to be over complaints from the GBC.⁴⁹

42 Gerald Harris, “Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists,” *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

43 Gerald Harris, “Homosexual group at Mercer concerns Ga. Baptists,” *Baptist Press*, Nov. 9, 2005.

44 Mary Alice Morgan interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May 1, 2024.]

45 Mary Alice Morgan interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May 1, 2024.]

46 Emily Hill, “Mercer deemed ‘too divergent’ for GBC,” *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 22, 2005.

47 Gerald Harris, “What’s up with the Mercer Triangle Symposium,” *The Christian Index*, Nov. 10, 2005.

48 John Blake, “Gay organization at Mercer disbands,” *The Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, (Atlanta, GA), Nov. 15, 2005.

49 The Associated Press, “Georgia Baptist Convention votes to sever ties with Mercer,” *Savannah Morning News*, (Savannah, GA), Nov. 16, 2005.

“I mean, [Dr. Drake] and I were the two that met with Dr. Godsey,” stated Morgan, “and he did not put pressure on us per se. We talked through the implications for the institution. I mean, clearly, the GBC was pissed off at him, not just a . . . we were a convenient lever for them to be able to say ‘f you’ as he was retiring. And that’s what they were doing. But it did feel I mean, I don’t wanna say it felt like an existential crisis for the university. I know in retrospect that it was. That the university had debt. And that the university would likely not have been able to make up a half million dollars or whatever. I don’t remember his mentioning the numbers to us. I’m sure he probably did, but I don’t remember. That was not the key feature. The key feature was his assuring us that if we did this, it would save student scholarships. And that, you know, as far as he was concerned, there would be no problem with our, you know, reorganizing afterwards. Dr. Fleming was also just a wonderful, calm, supportive presence. I mean but I

felt as though both of them wanted this break that was inevitable ultimately, to happen, but with the least harm. And on your own terms. To everybody. And on your own terms.”⁵⁰

“I mean, I think it was a concession to the GBC, honestly. That’s the way that I interpreted it at the time,” stated Porter when reflecting on the disbandment.⁵¹



When asked about her perspective of Coming Out Day and the attention that followed, Sherouse stated, “It was definitely very clear from the get-go that that this was a scapegoat situation.”⁵²

The opinions of whether or not this was the correct decision are still mixed even today, with some

feeling it was the right decision and right time and some feeling as though queer students were failed by the disbandment.

“Basically, at that point, the faculty were like, you know, the idea was that we need to shut down MTS to keep to keep Mercer students from getting the crap beat out of them by a bunch of homophobic rednecks over the weekend, basically,” stated Sherouse, “So there was some hope that if we shut down MTS, that if Mercer shut down MTS, that the GBC wouldn’t sever their ties, that they would consider that a win and that they would move on with their lives. So the idea was that MTS gets to be the sacrificial lamb so that

⁵⁰ Mary Alice Morgan interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May 1, 2024.]

⁵¹ Erin Porter, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [February 26, 2024.]

⁵² G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

Mercer can still keep its Baptist ties. Now mind you, a bit of context, I had one of those Baptist scholarships. That was the only thing that Mercer would have lost. So this was more of a, you know, this was more of a symbolic thing. It wasn't a financial thing. You know, one of the only things that the GBC funded were those Baptist student scholarships. And so, you know, yeah, there was some rhetoric about, like, Baptist students losing their scholarship because this organization exists. You know? There was a feeling around campus of tension for sure. You know? I mean, I think maybe some folks heard other people say things. I'm not aware of, like, any specific, like, hate crime type incidents, but there was tension. And the idea was, you know, that if MTS just kinda goes quietly, maybe maybe this won't be a huge disaster. Well, MTS went quietly, and the GBC still severed its ties."⁵³

Alex Morrison, who was not a member of MTS, stated, "[The disbandment] is really strange recall in this story looking back on it. I don't really know why that was such a strongly held position by some of the administration and SGA. I mean, I can see if they didn't want they didn't wanna lose money. They wanna lose partnership, etcetera. Definitely didn't wanna lose donors. I understand that."⁵⁴

When asked about whether there was a sense that MTS would re-form after everything blew over or if they thought MTS was gone for good with the disbandment, Trussell-Smith stated, "Once they had made that request of us, most of those meetings were about trying to elicit a promise from them that it would be temporary. And so we did have that, but the problem is that was then again part of that Mercer Triangle Symposium, it was mostly me trying to make sure that [the SGA president] was on my side. You know? Because he definitely was one of the ones who was not an ally. So, we knew that we had a student council who actually had to vote for us to create a student organization. And most of the people on student council were not gay allies. And so almost it didn't matter what Godsey and Fleming said because they don't make that decision, the student council does. And so then that is why that's another thing that, again, people are not happy about is that even the new organization was rebranded as just a, general DEI kind of club and not a gay straight alliance. But yes, we were very worried that disbanding could lead to not being allowed to be reinstated. And so that was probably the scariest time of the whole thing was between the disbanding and the approval of common ground." She also recalled that nobody involved in MTS seem to actually want to disband but felt as though their choices were extremely limited. "Having had this experience, I have a more nuanced understanding of what goes on behind closed doors versus what ends up happening in public, or what all the machinations and maneuvers are for what happens in public," she stated, reflecting on the time.⁵⁵

⁵³ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

⁵⁴ Alex Morrison interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 19, 2024.]

⁵⁵ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]

President Godsey's Reaction

On his part, Godsey strongly advocated against severing ties with the GBC and seemed to take the stance that encouraging conversations about these topics was what was important for academic success and freedom, stating, "Mercer University has never promoted, advocated, or encouraged gay or lesbian behavior. Discussion, yes, but encouragement, never."^{56 57 58}

"I think he didn't want the legacy of his presidency to be this ending of this relationship," said Trussell-Smith, "I think that history will look back on it positively, so I think in the end he might be glad that he did, but it wasn't his goal. He wanted to smooth it over."⁵⁹

President Godsey's previous statements and beliefs he had shared throughout his presidency had also been a major point of contention for the GBC. April Trussell-Smith, who grew up attending a Georgia Baptist church, recalled knowing about this tension prior to arriving at Mercer.

"This is they also my other memory from growing up in a Georgia Baptist, church was they already hated Godsey. They they hated him for, like, for his publications prior to this and whatever. So anything going on at Mercer that they didn't like, they were gonna try to pin it on Godsey. So that was that too," stated Trussell-Smith. She also recalled warnings she received from people at her church regarding Mercer. "I also had at the time that I started Mercer, the pastor and youth minister at my church were both Mercer grads, and they both warned me. I would guess they were about twenty years older than me. I don't know. So I would guess they graduated in the eighties maybe, but they both warned me about, how liberal Mercer was that, like, that I shouldn't listen to professors. I definitely shouldn't take classes in the Christianity department."⁶⁰

Mercer University and the Georgia Baptist Convention Split

On November 15, 2005, the Georgia Baptist Convention met in Columbus, Georgia for its annual meeting and voted to move forward with the first step towards splitting with Mercer University.⁶¹ The motion was first put forth by Reverend Fred Evers who stated that Mercer was too far from the GBC's values for the relationship to be fixed. He stated, in regard to wanting to have control over the selection of trustees, "We trust the people we put in charge to be like us. We sometimes get accused of wanting everybody to be just like us. That's not true. We don't want [the University of Georgia] to be like us . . . We want the people we give money to, who run the institutions that we have built, to be like us and be responsive to us."⁶²

⁵⁶ Triangle Symposium, page 8. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

⁵⁷ John Blake, "Gay organization at Mercer disbands," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, (Atlanta, GA), Nov. 15, 2005.

⁵⁸ Bernie O'Donnell & Rodney Manley, "Group votes to cut ties with Mercer," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 16, 2005.

⁵⁹ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]

⁶⁰ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]

⁶¹ Bernie O'Donnell & Rodney Manley, "Baptists take first official step to split with Mercer," *The Telegraph*. (Macon, GA), Nov. 20, 2005.

⁶² Bernie O'Donnell, "Baptists, Mecer prepare for split," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 17, 2005.

He also used a comparison between a parent and a child who is acting out or going against the morals of their parents to explain why the severance should happen. Diane Reasoner, the GBC's Communications Director, described the vote as "overwhelmingly" in favor of the decision; a majority of the 1,800 messengers who attended the convention voted for the severance.^{63 64} The GBC released a statement explaining reasons and disagreements leading to the split and describes an overall "incompatibility" between Mercer and the GBC. However, this split did not become official until a second vote occurred the following year.

The GBC stated four primary reasons for the severance:⁶⁵

1. Trustees were not chosen by the GBC, which was uncommon for GBC schools
 - a. The GBC executive director later discussed their concern over the Board of Trustees not being entirely Baptist⁶⁶
2. Disagreements with Dr. Godsey's religious standpoints, including arguments against a literal interpretation of the Bible, specifically in his 1996 book *When We Talk About God . . . Let's Be Honest*
3. While Mercer received money from the Southern Baptist Convention, they felt that Mercer was not committed to being a Southern Baptist Convention university
4. The Coming Out Day event at Mercer and the MTS in general, as the GBC felt that did not at all align with their value

While there were fears surrounding the split relating to the loss of scholarships, budget cuts, and increased tuition, none of this occurred with the split.

Georgia Baptist Convention votes to sever ties with Mercer

The Associated Press

COLUMBUS — The Georgia Baptist Convention voted Tuesday to sever ties with Mercer University during its annual meeting in Columbus.

But under the convention's rules, the split from the Baptist-affiliated college of 7,000 students will not become final unless the convention votes a second time to sever ties during its annual meeting in November 2006 in Duluth, said spokeswoman Diane Reasoner.

Monday, the group's executive committee voted in favor of the split during the convention's annual meeting in Columbus.

The organization's executive committee released a two-page letter Tuesday describing reasons for the intended separation, including a perceived lack of commitment by the university to the convention's affiliate, the Southern Baptist Convention.

Reasoner said Georgia Baptists

had questioned "whether to continue funding for Mercer."

In addition, Reasoner said Georgia Baptists were "deeply troubled" by news articles that discussed the Mercer Triangle Symposium, the school's first gay student group, which held an event last month that included National Coming Out Day.

"More troubling was the disclosure that supporters (of the gay student group) included faculty and members in Mercer's Department of Christianity," the letter said.

"For these and many other reasons, Georgia Baptists from around the state recognize that Mercer and the convention have grown apart in their values and commitment and many Georgia Baptists have expressed their desire to end the relationship," the statement said.

The committee also criticized Mercer University President R. Kirby Godsey's 1996 book, "When We Talk About God, Let's Be

Honest," saying it "condemned the fact that a president of one of its institutions would publish a book which deviated from biblical theology and doctrine."

Mercer officials previously said they did not know why the convention's executive panel made the decision.

"I am very disappointed by this action," Godsey said in a statement. Godsey pointed to a partnership between Georgia Baptists and the university that has existed for 175 years.

Mercer receives about \$3.5 million a year from the Georgia Baptist Convention. The convention previously had donated \$30 million to the university's nursing school.

The symposium held its final meeting on Monday after the head of the Georgia Baptist Convention complained the group, which was recognized by the school in 2002, conflicted with the university's Christian roots.

Mercer, Baptists eye end to fruitful tension

Tuesday was a sad day both for Georgia Baptist people and Mercer University. That's when a majority of the 1,800 "messengers" (delegates representing churches) at the Georgia Baptist Convention meeting in Columbus voted to sever ties between the convention and the school. It will take another vote at next year's session to make the divorce final. But the die seems cast.

The action reflects what has been going on in the Southern Baptist denomination nationally. Conservative leaders and churches attempt to exert authority over more liberally oriented educational institutions. Those push back in the name of academic freedom, accreditation or "soul freedom."

A number of historically Baptist colleges have severed ties with their state conventions. Some jumped, others were pushed. Lawsuits were often involved over property or over who would choose the trustees, the people who hire and fire school presidents.

Some, like Mercer, are regarded as the "flashy" institutions of Southern Baptist higher education in their states — Wake Forest University in North Carolina, Furman University in South Carolina, the University of Richmond in Virginia.

At such schools, the monetary contributions of the state convention play a minor role, about 2.5 percent of the annual budget in Mercer's case. The money is used for scholarships for needy Baptist students. But it's not just a matter of money.

LINK BROUGHT BENEFITS, CONFLICT

Founded by and named for a prominent early Baptist leader, Mercer has produced many pastors and lay church leaders. It recruits a goodly portion of its students from Georgia Baptist families. Many of its major donors and financial supporters have been Baptists.

Historically, tension has existed between the churches and the university — generally healthy but sometimes damaging.

During the 20th Century various faculty members have been criticized — usually by more conservative pastors and groups — for teaching evolution or promoting unorthodox views. (As a student, John Birch hated a number of his professors before the trustees on heresy charges). Administrators have been criticized for allowing politically or religiously incorrect speakers

courses or the library.

Under his predecessor Rufus Harris, and particularly during the tenure of President Kirby Godsey, the guerrilla warfare between the school and religious and social orthodoxy sometimes escalated into open hostilities.

Voluntary racial integration in the 1960s rolled social conservatives. The university's insistence on remaining autonomous rather than allowing the convention a role in selecting its trustees in the 1980s frustrated conservatives bent on control.

In a 1996 book Godsey threw down the gauntlet before the conservatives (fundamentalists to their foes) who had taken control of the Southern Baptist Convention by trenchantly disagreeing with some of their pet theological positions. Mercer opened its McAfee Theological Seminary in Atlanta as an alternative to the taken-over Southern Baptist institutions.

These and other actions led to angry resolutions and even official condemnations. But after each flare-up, peace papered over the simmering beneath.

THEY'LL MISS EACH OTHER

The last straw for the convention came when Mercer allowed a gay-straight alliance not only to exist on campus but to hold a "Coming Out Day" Oct. 1.

Godsey told the convention Tuesday that the school "has never promoted, advocated or encouraged gay or lesbian behavior. Discussion, yes, but encouragement, never."

But opponents responded that allowing the event to take place constituted tacit support, especially since a couple of Christianity Department faculty members were among those supporting the alliance in an advertisement in the student newspaper.

In the end the schism is not over whether Mercer is a good university, but whether it heeds to a super-orthodox line academically and prevents an image that conservative Baptists feel comfortable with.

So, it's sad. Mercer will miss the spiritual checks and balances imposed during its long existence in tension with would-be imposers of orthodoxy.

The Baptists of Georgia will miss the learning influence of linkage with an institution dedicated to protecting not only its own academic freedom (and accreditation), but the "soul freedom" Baptists historically have insisted upon to the point of

⁶³ Bernie O'Donnell & Rodney Manley, "Baptists take first official step to split with Mercer," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 20, 2005.

⁶⁴ The Telegraph, "Mercer, Baptists eye end to fruitful tension," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 17, 2005.

⁶⁵ Emily Hill, "Mercer deemed 'too divergent' for GBC," *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 22, 2005.

⁶⁶ J. Robert White, "White replies to Mercer," *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

"I'm not surprised but I was disappointed," stated Godsey, "It's a loss for the convention and a loss for Mercer . . . But Mercer has many alumni and friends."⁶⁷

Executive director of the GBC J. Robert White described the split as "a long time coming" and "long expected" by both groups.⁶⁸ Overall, he addressed the previously discussed reasons for the split and stated that Mercer's move towards more liberal ideology created an environment where MTS could exist and Coming Out Day could occur. He also stated that this was what pushed the Convention to finally vote to sever ties with Mercer. He felt that "mutual trust and respect" no longer existed in the relationship despite how "good" the convention had been to Mercer financially, as he put it.

White replies to Mercer

By J. Robert White
Executive Director
Georgia Baptist Convention

The recent decision of the Georgia Baptist Convention to discontinue its relationship with Mercer University has been a long time in coming, but also long expected by both Mercer and the Convention. There has been a divergence of commonality for many years.

Some suggest that the Convention is not happy with the governance of the school. There is some truth in that statement. The Convention has not been happy with the fact that Mercer's trustees are brought to position in a different process from that of the other Convention institutions. The change in procedure that allows the University to control who can be elected to serve on the trustee board was agreed to by the Convention around 1930, long before anyone might have perceived the plan as contributing to a decline in the relationship. As a result of the different process, University recommendations for the trustee board have been comprised of people who are Baptists, people who are in denominations other than Baptist and people who are not Christians. This has been unacceptable to the Convention that believes that a Baptist institution should be governed by Baptists.



Further, the Convention has been disenchanted with the liberal drift of the University. Dr. Godsey's book ex-

pressing his philosophy and theology was not well received by the Convention which formally censured the president of Mercer and condemned his book as heretical. It is deeply felt that the liberal environment of the university has created fertile ground for events such as that recently sponsored by the Mercer Triangle Symposium.

It was the Mercer Triangle Symposium sponsored "Coming Out Day" for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, recently held on the campus of Mercer University, that finally brought about the overwhelming vote at this year's Convention to discontinue the relationship. The motion came to the floor of the Convention as a recommendation from the Executive Committee of the Convention.

It needs to be said that the Georgia Baptist Convention has been good to Mercer University. Year after year, decade after decade, the Convention has given millions of dollars in support of the University. In recent years that annual contribution has reached \$3.5 million per year. When the Convention gave the College of Nursing to Mercer to enhance both the College and the University's medical education program, \$30 million was given to Mercer by the Convention to assist in the transfer and the long-term support of the Georgia Baptist College of Nursing.

Relationships are built on mutual trust and respect. Unfortunately mutual trust and respect have been missing from this relationship for a long time. There has been continual carping between the two, which has only served to contribute to the deterioration of the relationship. Certainly, the Convention has wondered frequently why the University has treated one of its strongest benefactors with disdain.

The Convention strongly agreed at its recent annual meeting in Columbus that the time to discontinue the relationship has come. Dr. Godsey and I have been asked by the Convention to take the necessary action to provide for an orderly discontinuance of the relationship. We will soon begin that process.

⁶⁷ Bernie O'Donnell & Rodney Malney, "Group votes to cut ties with Mercer," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 16, 2005.

⁶⁸ J. Robert White, "White replies to Mercer," *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

“We Are Mercer” Rally

While MTS had disbanded, that did not stop students from rallying together during this time.⁶⁹ On Friday, November 18, 2005, the “We Are Mercer” event was held in Jesse Mercer Plaza and featured a wide variety of speakers from different organizations on campus. The event was meant to symbolize unity among the Mercer community despite the conflict. The rally was captured on a camcorder by Dr. Mary Alice Morgan. Thanks to her documentation we have access to the entire speech and its contents.

“You know, the whole We Are Mercer rally kind of came out of that tension in that moment where, you know, where queer students got screwed and Baptist students got screwed and, you know, Mercer felt like it got screwed,” stated Sherouse, “And, you know, the desire was to just kind of calm tensions and reignite the unity, the spirit of unity, all that cheesy stuff. But, ultimately, it was the queer students who got screwed. You know? We were told that, you know, that we were going too far too fast that, that Mercer wasn’t ready for us. You know, and what does that say to us?”⁷⁰

According to Trussell-Smith, the idea for the rally stemmed from a group of professors and students involved in MTS meeting at Dr. Morgan’s house right after the GBC vote.

“And so then when this vote happens and we didn’t succeed in making it not happen, there’s sort of this moment of deflation, but then also, like I said, turning to, well, now how do we make sure that gay people on campus don’t get blamed for this? But there was also like I said, there was this whole flurry of, the flurry of time that we’ve spent, you know, like, Dr. Morgan and I spending all this time with our heads together, figuring out what to do every day, trying to what what’s our next move, what do we do. And it came to a head and a decision had been made, and so now it was exhausting. Right? And so we’re all hanging out at Dr. Morgan’s house, and, Andy Silver looks at me and says, so what do we do now? And I said, I don’t know. Why don’t you do something? And so the We Are Mercer rally then was the rest of them letting Dr. Morgan and me not make a decision, and that’s where they went,” stated Trussell-Smith.⁷¹

Erin Porter, an active member of MTS at the time, also helped to plan the event. She recalled, “It was very rushed, and I think that we were very happy with the attendance incident that, you know, we threw it together . . . It was just, like, a meeting up at a statue and people got up and talked about how important it was, you know, to save these organizations and to support gay people and that, you know, we’re Mercer and we’re the ones who, you know, like, we should be listened to, we should be respected, and, you know, that the Georgia Baptist Convention doesn’t really have anything to do with the school, and that they shouldn’t be able to dictate what we did. So honestly I remember it was a good crowd. It was better than we anticipated.”⁷²

⁶⁹ The Triangle Symposium, pages 44-45. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

⁷⁰ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

⁷¹ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]

⁷² Erin Porter, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [February 26, 2024.] “We Are Mercer” Rally, photographs November 18, 2005 donated by Mary Alice Morgan

Many students from various campus organizations spoke at the event, including April Trussell. In her speech, she discussed the fear experienced by Mercer students during this time.

Dear Fellow Mercerians,

This FRIDAY, November 18th, at 10:00AM Mercer students will rally in Jesse Mercer Plaza in unity with each other and in support of Mercer University students, faculty, staff, and administration. We, the students, are the heart of Mercer University, and it is important for us to come together. This event will show Mercerians as well as outside individuals and groups that we are a strong community dedicated to each other and our University, and that we will not turn against each other in times of difficulty and uncertainty, but will come together to preserve our academic freedom, our freedom of intellectual and spiritual inquiry, and above all our "community of respect." We will show the University and the community that "We are Mercer!"

This event is not sponsored by any one campus organization, but will feature speakers and leaders from a variety of campus groups, and individuals who represent all different backgrounds and beliefs. There will be students around campus wearing and distributing orange ribbons tomorrow and at the rally on Friday to promote the event and the spirit of unity that it represents.

Students, please pass this information on to your classmates and friends. Faculty and staff, please announce this event in your classes and encourage your colleagues to do the same. Forward this email to everyone you know at Mercer. It is very important that you help us get the word out. Tell every Mercer student you know that "We are Mercer" and encourage them to come on Friday and show their support. Thank you. See you Friday!

Beth Sherouse
Student, Mercer University

Please note that this event was changed from its original time to accomodate Dr. Godsey's Town Hall meeting on Monday, which we hope you will attend as well.

"I know this was actually, again, one of the things that those people were not happy with because they didn't like how much I praised Dr. Godsey. But here's the background of that, which is that, in the meeting I had with him, I had pushed him to schedule a time for him to talk to the student body and make it clear that MTS was not who caused this . . . I don't think he met my deadline . . . And so that speech was the speech version of the letter that I wrote to Dr. Fleming, which was not as much, I want it to look like I'm praising Dr. Godsey, but really what I'm doing is telling him what he's gonna do. Right? Because

what I'm saying is Dr. Godsey has promised that he will protect us, and Dr. Godsey is a good person who's not gonna let gay people take the blame . . . I had had conversations where privately, he had said that he was on board with our cause. Right? But he was not he was not publicly on board with the cause. And so I don't think I outed him as an ally necessarily, but I outed him as a protector of the university, right, and a protector of students' rights . . . And so sort of the, like, holding his feet to the fire to remind him that he's always been somebody who wasn't afraid to take on the establishment for what he believed was right. And so trying to remind him of that.



"And also then trying like, as you know, people weren't happy with the way I played it, but there was a lot for me of also playing gay people as not scary . . . I don't know how many of [the speakers at the rally] are allies now . . . but a lot of them were not. And so the point of this rally was to bring everybody together to make it not about the gay issue. Right? And so there were a lot of people who were afraid. A lot of those, the other organization's presidents who were like, what's April gonna say? Right? Like, how is she gonna make this into something that I'm gonna wish I wasn't a part of? And so that was what I was doing too. So it was sort of a political move, and then, like I said, one that made, I think, a lot of people who again, I was trying my hardest to represent, not happy with me"⁷³

⁷³ April Trussell-Smith, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [June 24, 2024.]



Another speaker at the rally, Timothy Durski, reflected on writing the closing prayer, stating, “I wrote it the night before. I remember sitting in my dorm in front of my Mercer issued laptop. I remember I think I was by myself in my dorm in the basement of Shorter, and I remember the lights were off. Had, like, one little overhead light on. And I remember just taking some time to pray about the situation and just asking God if he would inspire me with something to, you know, to guide what I

wrote.” He stated that he likely thought about, “What are the divisions between people, and what are the ways that we can meet each other on common ground? A lot of that’s religiously oriented . . . But just even in society, you know, between, social issues of race and gender, the, what are the ways that we can find common ground and support each other? So those were probably some of the things that were going through my mind as I was drafting this. It’s likely that I would have been obsessing over it all the entire morning of.”⁷⁴

Morrison also spoke at the rally and recalled thinking, “It was just very important to me to be a voice on campus for that after my voice had been used, throughout that process and hear from me.”⁷⁵



⁷⁴ Timothy Durski interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 17, 2024.]

⁷⁵ Alex Morrison interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 19, 2024.]

We Are Mercer! [Transcript of Speech]⁷⁶

November 18th 2005

(0:04) [**Tim Smith**]: And a community founded on respect, academic integrity, on the ability to have dialogue with one another and speak in respectful ways to one another. That's what makes Mercer a unique place. It's a unique community. Well, let me get here real quick so you can see me too. The main reason we're doing this is because we know this is a confusing time right now, and it's in a lot of times. It's a lot of ways. It's a painful time for most of us. The one thing we're trying to keep from happening is for that confusion to turn into fear and that pain to turn into anger. No one who has helped to organize this event or to push this Orange Ribbon initiative and this 'We Are Mercer' initiative, feels that any students or any group of students is to blame for this. And the last thing that we want to see happen is for us to start to fracture as a community. We want to remain true, remain faithful to our unique identity, and remain faithful to each other as Mercerians.

(1:18) Also, I want to encourage you to attend Dr. Godsey's meeting Monday morning. It's going to be in Java City at 10 AM. It's going to be a town hall meeting. You can ask questions there and he'll answer those questions, hopefully, questions that we don't have the answers to right now and we can't provide. So that's the very important things to find out, all that we can find out before we start trying to say what's going on, trying to, you know, take a stand. The first speaker is going to be one of my very good friends, our Vice President of student body, Jamie Geiger. But first he's going to lead us into hymn in the one in The Bond of Love.

(2:00) [**Jamie Geiger**]: Good morning and thank you all for being here this morning. Actually, we're going to do the hymn after I talk because I think it'll work better that way. And I'm going to stand over here in the shade so that I can see and maybe you can see. And so I can look at my notes. As Tim just said, we've all come here together today on the premise of unity. And something I think I want to be very clear about this morning is that I don't feel unity exists when everyone agrees on every point. If there are no differences in the things being united, then those things are essentially the same. And therefore there's really no such thing as unity. I think true unity exists only when there are differences. We all, all here today are different. We are some of us are liberal, some of us are conservative, some of us are black, some of us are white, some of us are heterosexual, some of us are homosexual. We all have differences but we are united and we can come together under the bond of being Mercerians. The mission statement of the university says that we affirm religious and moral values based on a judeo-christian perspective of the world. Now I think the greatest of these values is love.

⁷⁶ "We Are Mercer" Rally, Video, November 18, 2005 donated by Mary Alice Morgan

(3:14) To quote from scripture, when Christ is asked Father what is the greatest of the commandments, He replies it is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind and with all of your strength. And the second of these is like it, Love thy neighbor as thyself. Now of course loving God is up to you individually and let me encourage you to do so. But loving each other, loving as individuals, that's something that we can all experience whether we are religious or not. And let me encourage you that you know to experience love is to experience and show it in compassion and respect and the desire for the well-being of others, occasional friendly admonishment. And just like true unity only exists when there are differences, I believe true love only exists when there are differences. For to love someone that is exactly like yourself. Although, because I am a megalomaniac and a bit of an egoist, I would love someone that was exactly like me. But I truly believe that true love only exists when there are differences, when you can come together and in spite of those differences, love someone.

(4:28) So my challenge to you today, my challenge to you as Mercer students, is to come together in love and respect and compassion for your fellow students. Come together as Mercerians. Come together first as Mercerians.

(4:44) This is definitely a frustrating time. know that probably the majority of you are a mix of feelings. I know myself, I have been frustrated and angry and saddened and upset and amazed at the situation over the past two weeks. But the way to combat that, the way to combat those feelings and the situation, is for us to come together. This is certainly not a time for us to break off into factions, to have the liberal group over here or the religious conservatives over here or the homosexuals over here. Apart from the heterosexuals, no. That can only pour, pour, you know, fuel on the fire and separate us further. Now is the time for us to come together again. Yes, we are all different. I have to be clear about that. But when we come together, that is when we maintain the integrity of this university. And that's pretty much all that I have to say. So my challenge again is to leave you today with love and respect your fellow students. Come together and that's the best way for us to combat this situation.

(5:49) Now I'd like to lead us in a prayer. Oh, God, I want to thank you today for the warming weather. I want to thank you today for this, this time that we all have to share this time that we have to come together to be Mercerians first, despite of all of our differences. I pray today that you would touch our hearts and give us the unconditional love that only you can give, so that we may come together in love and respect and compassion to deal with this situation, calm our hearts, and I pray that you would give us a future. In name I pray, amen. If you will now take your program, you will see a list of words printed. It's the first verse of the hymn The Bond of Love, which we will now say. And if you are a singer, please sing loudly.

The Bond of Love

We are one in the bond of love.
We are one in the bond of love.
We have joined our spirit with the Spirit of God.
We are one in the bond of love.
We are one in the bond of love.
We are one in the bond of love.
We have joined our spirit with the Spirit of God.
We are one in the bond of the Lord.
We have joined our spirit with the Spirit of God.
We are one in the bond of the Lord.

Thank you. I would like to introduce now April Trussell. April, come on up.

(8:02) [**April Trussell-Smith**]: Thank you, Jamie. Talking about love, I'm going to talk about fear. Many of us are afraid. Some of us are afraid we'll lose our Baptist scholarships. Some of us are afraid we'll lose our right to assemble as students. Some of us are afraid that because of our sexual orientation or our affiliation with MTS, we will be the target of backlash, finger pointing, and discrimination. I am afraid that when I go home this weekend to my family and my home church, I will be interrogated or even condemned. But we cannot give in to fear, we must not give each other a reason to fear. Fear and love cannot exist in the same heart. This is a time for love and respect. Our community of respect depends upon our resistance to an active fight against fear. You can show your refusal to give in to fear by wearing an orange ribbon and a rainbow ribbon, both are available here today.

(9:10) We are stepping into the unknown, but we are following a great man. President Godsey has assured us that there is nothing for us to fear. He will protect Mercer's students. When I attended the Georgia Baptist Convention annual meeting on Tuesday, I cannot tell you how proud I was to see Doctor Godsey standing for our academic freedom and our rights. President Godsey is a man of courage, fully capable of making sure Mercer makes it through this difficult time. He has this courage because he is standing on the principles for which this university was founded, and he gathers strength from those principles and from Mercer's long history of standing for academic freedom and for freedom of intellectual and spiritual inquiry. As long as we avoid being conquered by our fears, we can follow his lead and remain calm and move forward in love and respect. Thank you. And now I can introduce Lidya Admassu, who is the president of NAACP and she's a senior.

(10:20) [Dr. Lidya Admassu-Melesse]: Hi everybody. I'm actually Co-president of NAACP and my other president isn't here today. She had to leave out of town. But I'm going to talk today about unity. My name is Lidya Admassu. I was born in Adi Sababi, Ethiopia. I moved to Khartoum, Sudan and later on in my life, I moved to the United States. Now my roommate, she is from New Orleans and she has lived in New Orleans all her life -born and raised and one of my close friends, also the secretary, is from Beaumont, TX -born and raised. Now all three of us were very different people. We were all born in different places, lived in different environments, we encountered different people. But we all are here at Mercer together. Mercer not only allows people with different and diverse backgrounds, but they actively strive to find people with different backgrounds to come to this institution for a reason. They don't want you to just have an academic education. They want you to educate yourself on people also. It doesn't make sense to have an institution that has all the same people.

(11:28) Now, I don't agree with everything that my friend or my roommate does. I don't agree with their political views sometimes, and sometimes I don't agree with their moral views, but I respect their views. Whether or not I believe it or I like it, I still respect it no matter what. And that's what I'm encouraging everyone here to do. Now, you don't have to agree with what everyone else does. You don't have to like it, but you do need to respect it. We're all here because we're all Mercerians. We're the backbone of this institution. Without the students, without the faculty, there would be no Mercer University. And then again, without Mercer University, you wouldn't be here today learning what you are today. You would not be the beautiful people that you are standing in front of me. You wouldn't have your opinions, you wouldn't have your views, and you wouldn't be fearless to voice your opinions. So I just, I stand here today as a Mercer student. I come from a very diverse background and I'm very liberal about my views. I believe that everyone should have their own opinion because that's what the United States is all about and that's what Mercer is all about. We were founded and we have evolved a lot. We are not the same institution that we were when the school was founded. The school is always striving to do bigger and better things, and although we're under a time which is kind of shaky, we're on shaky ground right now. I just want everyone to remember you are all people, individuals, but you all have something in common.

(12:56) You're all here at Mercer and you all have invested your time and your money into an institution that you should be proud of. And you should be proud of your fellow students, because your fellow students are helping you become who you are today. Don't you don't have to like what they do, but you definitely have to respect it. And you have to become unified. Because if we're we've basically what my mentor always told me, If you're united, you will stand strong but divided you will fall. And I'm encouraging you to stand up. Now I'm going to introduce Will Emerson. He will be speaking.

(13:37) [**Will Emerson**]: Thanks. It's great to see so many people made it out this morning on such short notice. I think that really shows how involved the mercer community is, and how dedicated they are to coming together in this situation. I guess first of all as SGA Senator I would just like to say thanks to everybody for coming together. If you ever have any troubles, or situations like these, you can always feel free to come speak to us. If you see one of us walking around, or Mondays at 5:30 you can come talk to us about how you feel. I know a lot of you are scared right now or maybe about losing scholarships in this, but I think the answer to that is not to fight amongst each other but to come together in situations like these. I think the thing about being in a community is that not everybody has to have the exact same feelings or the exact same ideas. That's a part of being in a community is to respect other people. I think the main thing about this to me is I have a dream of baptists and homosexuals coming together in friendship and unity in the Mercer community. And I think that's really the most important thing. I came out here today with not a set speech ready. I think the other speakers did really great things. I think the main thing is to respect each other. I think this is really a great showing, what we're seeing here today. Thanks. Our next speaker is going to be Alex Morrison of the Cluster.

(15:23) [**Alex Morrison**]: Thanks. I'm going to stand up here because while I am tall, I'm not as tall as Will. Actually, I'd like to start with the word of prayer too, if no one's opposed that since I have the microphone, you got to have to. Join with me. Please.

(15:54) Heavenly Father, Provider, sustainer, I thank you so much for just this one showing of unity that we can come together in much of a way that you called us and required of us to have unity as a body. That's the only way that we can be effective is if we are united and act as one though we are different. I thank you, Father, for this blessing, these hearts, these minds, these people. I'm sure that you'll provide many blessings for us as we go. It's in Christ's name, I pray. Amen.

[Audience]: Amen.

(16:39) I suppose that I'm going to come from a typical perspective of me. Many of you don't know what my typical perspective is, but I'm a huge fan of our greatest faculty as human beings, which is reason. And if there's one thing that we can look at and say that's not reason, it's what would we commonly call passion or fear, anything that causes to react in a way that we have not gone through thoughtfully, respectfully. So that's one thing that I would like to call for you, is that you don't just act that you think and once you've done this, you'll realize what community is all about. That though we disagree, there's something that's common to all of us and that, and that's power, that's humanity. And here specifically, that's being at Mercer, being students, and what do students do? They learn. If we are not learning through this and we're just acting blindly, then we're not doing anything. So that's what that's really the charge for all of us, myself included, is to not just run at the mouth about something that maybe pulled a heartstring or two, but to actually think of this from all the varying perspectives. And like Jamie said, like everyone has said, there are many perspectives to come from this. And like I said, I mean, even if you don't look at the spiritual elements of things as a - we can look at all the philosophies in the past that have said if we are opposed to each other, we will all live in fear and life will be nasty, brutish and short. So everything that we've done here will be short lived if we're not united. And So what? What's that?

(18:58) I guess the greatest thing that's going to unite us here is truth. And I see here, right in front of me a quote from Jesse Mercer. The standard of truth is in the God of truth, God of truth, God religious university. Sounds kind of familiar to me. I like, I mean, I like to think that we could all acknowledge this existence of something greater than us, truth, God, otherwise. But if we join together, we'll be a little closer to that. Also another quote that I saw down there today is to devote your youthful days to the acquisition of all possible useful knowledge. Sounds like you should take every side. I mean I'm just it amazes me at what Jesse Mercer has said could be so well applied today. And one other thing before I leave, I'm sure that you're probably tired of hearing me is that, yeah, I am from the cluster and I can print something that's very voracious.

(20:06) And I could do that. But will I? Would that be fair? Would that be balanced? No. So also, I'm calling you all to be journalists in the most respectful term. Be objective, be fair, be balanced in your assessments, because I know that's what I would do. I wouldn't just look at what someone's report says and go with That is the truth. Truth is something that we have to aim at and discern for ourselves. But if we're going to discern it for ourselves, we're going to have to listen to all the other people here, all the other perspectives, all the other views. And what that will breed is community. That is unity. That is a body that is collective because we all respect each other. Thank you. And now to close this deal is a good friend of mine, Mr. Tim Durski.

(21:17) [**Tim Durski**]: Unless anyone else has anything to offer, this will be it. We're going to close in prayer and then you are free to go. Though I would encourage you to stay and talk with each other. Wow, there's a lot of you people. I'm glad to see you here. Let's pray.

(21:41) Father. We recognize you as sovereign over us and as the author of Peace and Truth in Our Lives. The hope we have in you can unite us as a community, though we often miss the mark. We know you love us and give us enough strength to do what you have called us to. May we be a community of peace, of truth, and of progress. We ask unassumably, that we may be agents of light in a dark world, sharing in your work. Inwardly that both in and out of the classroom we might seek harmony with an understanding of each other and outwardly in the larger community, that we might seek justice and truth and be agents of peace and charity. Let your work begin in this community and through this community, and we may be mindful of your presence over us and in us. All praise is yours, Almighty Father, we pray this in your name, for our sake and for your glory. Amen.

[Audience]: Amen.

(22:41) That's it guys. Thanks for coming.

END

President Godsey Speaks to Mercer Community

On Monday, November 21, President Godsey held two town hall meetings (one for students and one for faculty) where he discussed the split and emphasized that MTS was not at fault.^{77 78} He stated that MTS and Coming Out Day were not at the forefront of conversations he had with the GBC. During this discourse, Godsey, while outwardly opposing the split, stood for academic freedom and for maintaining Mercer's values related to having conversations that are diverse with different viewpoints. He explained the resistance to following all of the GBC's guidelines by stating that allowing the GBC to restrict one aspect of Mercer would spiral until academic freedom was gone. He addressed multiple concerns regarding the split during these meetings, including enrollment, which he said he did not think would be impacted since Mercer was not attended only by Baptist students; Mercer ignoring its Baptist roots, which he said would not happen and Mercer would always be a Baptist university; and alumni relations, which he also did not think would be greatly affected. He stated that while some alumni may decrease their donations to the school, others would likely increase their donations, so he did not foresee a significant change in that area.

"Mercer is a Baptist university," he stated, "That's not something that can be changed by a vote of the convention."⁷⁹

While Godsey assured students that Coming Out Day was not the reason for the split, others had different opinions, including one of the Mercer trustees, Griffin Bell.⁸⁰ He stated that he saw the issue as arising abruptly and not as something gradual since there was no room for conversation and negotiation. However, others associated with Mercer stated that the split had been on the horizon for decades. In addition to Dr. Mary Alice Morgan recording the "We Are Mercer!", she also recorded the speech given by Dr. Godsey, which is transcribed here. This documentation allowed us to specifically gather questions and answers exchanged at this address, adding more in depth understanding of the severance.



⁷⁷ Alex Morrison interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 19, 2024.]

Bernie O'Donnell, "Godsey reassures Mercer community about split," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 22, 2005

⁷⁸ Bernie O'Donnell, "Godsey reassures Mercer community about split," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 22, 2005

⁷⁹ Linda S. Morris & Tim Sturrock, "Panel upset with Mercer," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 15, 2005).

⁸⁰ Bernie O'Donnell, "Godsey reassures Mercer community about split," *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 22, 2005

Dr. Kirby Godsey Address to Mercer University
[Transcript of Speech]⁸¹
November 21st 2005

[Recording Begins]

Dr. Kirby Godsey:

Thank you for coming. I'm going to make a few brief comments, and then I'll be happy to respond to questions that you may have or that you wish to ask on behalf of others. Let me remind all of us that this university was founded back in 1833 by Georgia Baptist under the leadership of Jesse Mercer and Adeil Sherwood, principally. They were the prime movers of education. Education was not a popular idea in 1833, especially among ministers. And, there were many opponents of education and an educated ministry. But, nevertheless, Jesse Mercer for one and others, believed that it would be impossible to sustain the Baptist denomination and, in particular, to sustain their initiative in missions with which they did not, provide and build education? And, around that same period, a tier of institutions was started, including, University of Richmond in Wake Forest and Furman and Mercer, all within one or two years of one another. Mercer really started as a manual training, manual labor institute, which meant that the students all worked in the fields every day. Not something we don't practice today, but it became a university in 1838.

Jesse Mercer also was responsible for beginning the Georgia Baptist Convention. He began the Georgia Baptist Convention, Mercer University, and Christian index. The convention began in 1822 and was begun for the stated purpose, beginning a college in Georgia. And of course, Mercer University was the outcome of that development. Now, certainly, the unilateral decision of the Georgia Baptist Convention this past week, I believe that was a tragic mistake, for the convention and certainly, from my point of view, a disappointment with respect to our relationship to the convention. Mercer's role in part, I think, through the years has been to serve as a kind of intellectual force in the life of Baptist, and to educate Baptist students. And the ties to the convention also reminded us as an institution of the values that undergird this university, values that are profound and deep and date back, from our beginning. So that our time of convention was valuable in that respect as well. But the Georgia Baptist Convention is, for those of you who are not familiar, is a kind of quasi, political and management organization. And that organization, in the last decade, has come to be controlled chiefly by a very conservative segment of the Baptist denomination. Baptists historically have been marked by their commitment to religious freedom, by their respect for religious diversity and their tolerance of diversity of viewpoints. They talk a lot about the sole freedom and the right of an individual to hold different religious perspectives. But as the convention has become more conservative, it has become focused on exercising greater control over all of the institutions that it supports. And, of course, control, as I've tried to make clear the convention, control really is contrary to the character of a university. And the Baptist word, for that matter, has not been controlled, it has been cooperation.

⁸¹ "Dr. Kirby Godsey Address to Mercer University" Speech, Video, November 21, 2005 donated by Mary Alice Morgan

And our relationship with the convention has been one based on cooperation and not control. But while we are a Baptist university, and I personally hope that Mercer will continue to be a Baptist university, we are, first of all, a university. And we cannot be a good university. We cannot be a good Baptist university even without a commitment to, free and open inquiry, to intellectual freedom, to the freedom to debate difficult and even controversial issues, to respect for differing viewpoints. That's a part of the character of the university. Now I wanna assure you that even and I think they would agree, the leaders of the Georgia Baptist Convention would agree, that they certainly do not represent all Baptists. Mercer University has many Baptist friends in Georgia. And many of the people that actually make up the congregations of Georgia are simply, outside the sort of quasi political work that goes on in the convention itself. But, there are many friends of Mercer among Baptists in this state, and we continue as a university to embrace historic Baptist Baptists. And the action taken by the convention this past week is an action that has to be confirmed again, voted on again in November of 2006. That convention will be held in Atlanta, I think the eastern part of the island. Not exactly sure where it is, but it's in the Atlanta area.

In reality, what's going to happen during this year is that I, as the president of the university, along with probably some of our board members, will sit down and work with the leaders of the Georgia Baptist Convention to try to achieve a mutually amicable separation, formal time from a convention. Now it is true that our revenues, from this, from the Georgia Baptist, total about 3.5 million dollars a year, which represents about two and a half percent of universities. But I wanna assure you, I think I have in writing already, but I want to assure you that no student at the university will lose their Baptist scholarship, his or her Baptist scholarship because of the action of the Georgia Baptist Convention. All of those scholarships will remain in place and active and will not be diminished, whatsoever because of this action by the convention. I can also say that while there certainly are tuition increases, every year, there is not going to be some extraordinary increase in tuition that is based on this action. I would expect our increase in tuition would be, generally, in the range of where it was last year, certainly would not vary probably more than a percent from last year.

We will, of course, have to accommodate some reductions in the university, and we will be looking at those during this year. But, I want to assure you that they will not be taken out of scholarships. I do want to ask for your patience and your indulgence over the next several months, we will be negotiating matters that affect funding, that affect scholarships, that affect income over the next several years. It is our hope that funding can be diminished gradually, but we have no evidence of that. Certainly, we have the capacity to simply cut that off all at once. Though they have adopted a budget, and that budget goes through the remainder, goes through December of 06'. However, I guess one implication of that is that there will be no changes in the budget year in which we're in, that are precipitated by this change, though where vacancies occur, we probably will take a closer look at it to make sure that these are positions that need to be refilled. We do need to make sure that we realize that we do have to make these adjustments.

What this presents, let me say, for the university is not some kind of financial crisis. It represents a financial challenge that we can and will meet, over the next year. I want also before I take questions, to thank you for honoring our commitment to being in a community of respect for one another. And, we have a responsibility, I might add, to act responsibly and respectfully of those who disagree with us. There are people who disagree with the openness of a university who are uncomfortable with the fact that we explore difficult and challenging issues. And, they can't make that fit into their own world view. I wanna tell you these are not bad people. People of the Georgia Baptist Convention, even those who disagree with us and who would vote to discontinue their support of the university. These are not bad people.

They should not be seen as bad people. They're people who see the world differently, but there are a lot of people who see the world differently, and we need to, as we affirm our own commitment to intellectual freedom and to open inquiry, we need to be tolerant and respectful of those, who do not view the world in that way. We all, as the scriptures say, we all see through a glass darker. It does seem to me that sometimes some glasses are a little darker than others, but, nevertheless, none of us have all of the answers. So, placing blame, for this episode in particular, is completely unwarranted. Even placing blame on the Mercer Triangle Symposium is a mistake. The Mercer Triangle Symposium was not responsible for this event or this action of the convention.

It really has been developing for many years. When I met privately with the leaders of the convention in an executive session, It is interesting to me that no question was raised about the Mercer Triangle Symposium. They wanted to know if I would ask the faculty to sign a certain statement of belief, and I said no. But, there was no question about that. So, of course, Mercer will always be open to the discussion of difficult and controversial religious and social issues and that characteristic of the university should not and will not change. But we must do so in the context of a community that is marked with respect and civility and even of humanity, because we don't have all the answers. We're not people who sit high, that have a perfect view of the world and have a perfect understanding of all the issues facing humankind. We do not. And, while we debate and pursue these issues, we need to do so in the context of respect and civility. We learn, of course, by not only articulating our own views, we learn by listening to those views of others and learning from the people with whom we disagree.

We're never about, in my view, we're never about judging or condemning here at the university. We begin somewhere else. We're about learning. We're about understanding. We're about integrity. We're about civility and respect. The real issue, of course, with the Georgia Baptist Convention relates not to the ideas that are explored in Mercer. The real issues, issue underlying, this, this proposed discontinuance of support revolve around governance. And it's been, it's been discussions that have been going on for some time. Mercer is the only Baptist school in Georgia, whereby our trustees, in effect, are sustained by their own direction. That is, our trustees are nominated exclusively by Mercer's board, and the convention elects

from those nominated by Mercer's board, but the convention can never nominate a trustee for Mercer. So, Mercer Board of Trustees controls the pipeline, so to speak, controls the process by which a person becomes a trustee at the university. So it is the selection process for trustees that is, of some concern, to our Baptist friends - and, the academic independence of the university, which we treasure, so highly. I've always taken the position that we should never disrupt our relationship with Baptists because we disagree with them or because we didn't know it because their views are so different or because they even express hostile feelings. That always should be on the basis of principle if we ever separate.

In this case, they've taken the unilateral election to discontinue their support of Mercer, But, they've made it clear that they do not wanna support institutions that have a freely elected board of trustees or that are built on an unpredictable commitment to academic independence. A final comment, from my own perspective as a person of faith and a Baptist. I am a Baptist. I plan to continue to be a Baptist. But I wanna say to you all that, it is my belief that God's relationship with us and that God's grace toward us are never encumbered by gender or by sexual orientation any more than they are by race or ethnicity. God affirms and accepts each of us without condition, And I hope we too can learn to see enough light that we can relate to one another, both in the student body of this university community with grace and compassion. I believe that the principles upon which this university was founded was that the hope of humankind, finally, does not rest in our ability to think alike, to look alike, or to see the world in the same way. Our real human hope lies in being able to embrace one another, those we agree with and those we do not agree with, those we like and those we do not like, that we are able to embrace one another with grace and compassion. I believe those are the great principles upon which this university is founded, And I hope we can continue to embrace those principles here at Mercer. I appreciate your coming today, and I want to invite you to ask questions that you may have. There are two microphones. I want to encourage you to go to one of the microphones if you have questions so others may hear your questions as well as so that I may hear it. But, I'd like to open it up now for questions and, thank you for being here. Do you have questions?

[Individuals stand and gather in a line to ask Dr. Godsey their questions]

Presumed Female Student: Yes, first I will say I appreciate you coming out to speak to us the students to what's going on personally. I guess my question is, there is road work that certain projects going on in the future, as far as building the hotel and a new welcome center. I was wondering if these projects will be put off or changed altogether due to this situation?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: I expect no change in the capital properties of the university. We will be breaking ground later this year on the science and engineering building, later early next year, I think, in January. We'll be broke the ground for the actual began construction. The new hotel, I think, is on schedule. So I don't expect this action. There are always priorities and these things have to work their way to becoming

the highest priority. We've, obviously, we've done a lot of construction in recent years, and we've certainly slowed the pace of that, but I expect us to continue to do work over the next several years. I don't think the actions of the George Baptist Convention will have a material impact on campus development.

“ Jeff ”: President Godsey, I don't have a question as much as I would like to, but I can tell you that I think you've done an excellent job handling this both within the university and what I've read in the media. And I also like to thank you for standing up for our academic freedoms through this situation. So thank you.

[Audience applause]

Thank you. Is there another question?

Presumed Male Individual: You answered my questions really directly related to Jeff's question. But it seems to me that the university lately, through the media, has been saying very different things than they have been saying to the students through trustees and quote by administration. One, one trustee was quoted saying that he spoke for the university saying that the only type of gay related organization that he would support was one that promoted celibacy, within the university. And then you say things like, you know, unconditional free inquiry. So where is this disconnect coming from, with what you're saying to the students and what you're saying to the media?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Trustees had no policy whatsoever to try to inhibit or restrict, the academic free inquiry of the university. That's not to say that some trustees may not have a differing opinion. But the trustee, the opinion of a particular trustee does not represent the policy of the board. The trustees individually, don't have views. They have opinions, which they are, certainly free and and it's important for them to express. It is the board corporate as a whole that sets policy. And, the board of trustees of the University has never set any policy that restricts free inquiry at the university. Quite the opposite, actually. That doesn't mean that some that a given trustee may express a different view that I might hold or you might hold or or another trustee might hold. We certainly have great diversity of field holders in the board, but the board comes together in terms of policies. And, the board of trustees is quite resonated in their commitment to, to the academic strength of university and to the, and to intellectual freedom, respect for religion and diversity. I hope that's helpful. I don't think there is a real disconnect between what the board is and I'm sure there's not between what the board is and where the university is.

Presumed Male Individual: *[Continued from question]* Besides financially, do you see this decision made by the GBC, to affect the school in any other way?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Well, let me say, you know, I think it does present a challenge for us in that respect. If we expect to remain a Baptist University, which I hope we will, we'll have to be more intentional about it. I mean, we'll have to work at it more, more resolutely and more deliberately. That's, obviously, a vote of the Georgia Baptist Convention cannot take away our Baptist identity. That's how that's what Mercer is. That's how we got here. But we will have to be more resolute and more intentional about our commitment to being a Baptist university as a university community, I believe, in the years that you have.

Presumed Female Individual: My last question is kinda around the same issue. You said that Mercer is a Baptist university and that we'll remain a Baptist university. But do you think that separation from the Georgia Baptist Convention *[video skips]* brings into play challenges that we'll face as far as Mercer is moving away from becoming a dry canvas.

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Well, personally, I don't think it should. But, that would be for future administrations to address. I happen to think that alcohol has become a serious problem, in, among colleges and universities.

[Audience member sitting next to videographer]: Mhmm. Thanks, Wake Forest.

Dr. Kirby Godsey: How does that policy - may be shaped in years to come? I can't predict, but I don't think it will, have, it's not gonna be a direct tie to this, action of the Georgia Batsch Minister. That is to say, when, incidentally, I don't, I don't think the chief meaning of being a bachelor university is that you can't drink on campus.

[Audience laughs]

That's part of what it means to be a bachelor's university, not that you were suggesting that. But it is part of the custom and commitment and character of this university and, I think that it's likely to continue to be, for a while.

Presumed Male Individual: Doctor Godsey I was wondering along sort of the same lines, I guess, again, although we're looking to recognize the Georgia Baptist Convention, what are the possibilities for us... perhaps strengthening ties, officially or non official with other faith traditions, other Baptist groups, other Christian groups, and how would that be able to look into our identity as a Christian university?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: First of all, I mean, I think we're gonna give a lot of thought as an institution of how we relate to Baptist in the future. Again, this action of the Georgia Baptist Convention has to do with a formal relationship with a convention. Georgia Baptist are much larger, much broader, than the Georgia

Baptist Convention. There are 3600 Baptist churches in Georgia, and there are, well over a million, probably a million and a half, Baptist in Georgia. We will certainly reach out to Baptist churches and reach out to Baptists. I think Mercer will continue to serve as a resource to Baptist in Georgia. As I said, we have many Baptist friends. I'm getting lots of emails and letters from Baptist to support Mercer. And I think we'll want to continue to support, university. So we will, no doubt work on ways of relating constructively and actively, with the Baptist of Georgia because we no longer have a relationship with the Georgia Baptist Convention, should not mean that we no longer have a relationship with Baptists and with Baptist churches.

Presumed Male Individual: Let me first say, thank you again for coming and speaking to us today. I have sort of a two part question. One being, as you were saying, it seems there is no benefit for either the GBC or Mercer University in this split. So what is the GBC trying to gain? -

[Audience member sitting next to videographer]: Money for Shorter.

Presumed Male Individual: And the second part being, since the split has now or has occurred and is on its way to being official. What is the possibility for the reconvening of MTS? And is that could that have any consequences with the Georgia status commission, such as the immediate pulling of funding? Are there any things that we need to be worried about here on campus?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: I don't think there's anything to be worried about. First question, what is to begin? I don't know that there's anything to be gained. Certainly, I think there's I think the Georgia Baptist Convention is losing something important. They're losing a relationship with the most significant Baptist institution in Georgia. And they're giving up that relationship, which is profoundly important to them, I believe. But, I believe that what they are gaining is, trying to be true to their principles. And I think their principles are wrong, but their principles are that they shouldn't support anything they don't control. But it's difficult. And, so I think they're trying to be faithful to themselves, and consistent. They are quite clear that they understand the truth and, and they said what the truth is and that you don't adhere to their statement that you're somewhere outside the boundaries of what should be affirmed by the convention. And so I think that's what they've gained trying to be faithful to their own, to their own principles and beliefs.

MTS, certainly this, this university will, always be open to, the discussion, frank discussion, open discussion of, of difficult and, as I said, controversial issues, you know, at Mercer. The next several months, I did, ask for some patience. We're, I don't want to be distracted, at least at Mercer. The next several months are gonna be crucial negotiations. I'd like not to be terribly distracted during those negotiations. The openness of this campus to discuss, issues of gay and lesbian issues will continue and will not be abridged.

Presumed Male Individual: Doctor Godsey, it seems to me that, you know, as you've been saying, there is definitely a fundamental difference in the principle of philosophy of the Georgia Baptist Convention and of Mercer, you know, with regard to, creative expression and academic integrity. So why then, in borrowing money, should we as a university seek, I guess, and have a full break necessarily? Why, you know, don't we just stand up and be defiant and say, this is who we are, and this is what we believe, and we we're gonna just, you know, keep our detectives to sell here for three and a half million dollars?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Well, you know, integrity is not a matter of being defiant. Integrity not only means being clear about who you are and where you stand, but being willing to be tolerant of people who stand in a different place. While I'm clear that we are great principles that are critical to the life of this university, it doesn't mean that we need to be defiant, or, condescending toward people who hold different views. So I would I think the better course is for us to be, committed and resolute about the principles for which we stand, academic independence, intellectual freedom, respect for religious diversity, without feeling that we have to be, that we have to reject or be ugly toward people who disagree with us and even toward people who would reject us. Baptists, Georgia Baptists, have invested a lot in Mercer. We wouldn't be without them. And so I'm grateful for who joined the Baptist Star. I'm sorry that they are choosing to go their own way independent of a relationship with this university. But I'm also grateful for what they meant to Mercer through the years. And, while I feel that we must stand for Mercer's independence, it does not suggest to me that we need, anyway, not to express our appreciation, our gratitude for the support of Baptist through all these years and, and the support, some of which I hope will continue in the years ahead. As far as the, Yes. We will try to work out a civil and amicable separation, because that's the, because that's a better way to do business rather than simply to, throw up our hands and walk away and never have another conversation.

Presumed Male Individual: Doctor Godsey, You just made a comment that we could discuss that whole sexuality, which is trying to change by any of these events. I would like to know how does that relate to such media outlets such as *The Mercer Cluster*, *The Dulcimer* - or radio

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Well, actually, we actually have a publication board that tries to oversee, what, what is reasonable to put on the, put on the air in the newspaper. It is not the case that anything goes in the newspaper or on television. It's not the case that anything goes in the Macon Telegraph. So there are limits in terms of what is prudent to publish. So, when we say that, we have the freedom to inquire and freedom to discuss issues, certainly, we're not going to allow hate speech or or, hateful actions, to, to be present in our discussions. They're simply out of order in a community of respect. So, certainly, there are, proven, founders, for publications as well as, for things like, television. Now those prudent boundaries are flexible and must be determined, by that's why we have something like a publication board to help evaluate those boundaries, and, what, makes sense, for this community.

Presumed Female Individual: Yes. I actually have two questions. But first, before I ask my first question, just to clarify, the GBC did fund the Baptist Heritage Grant. Correct?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Well, monies from GBC were used in funding that. Yes. Oh, they didn't fund it directly. They gave money to the university. That's how the university chose to use the money. So they didn't devise that grant. That that grant was devised by the university using resources plus others. Your resources and university to fund those grants.

Presumed Female Individual: Okay. And so in response to that, what resources will we have in order to fund those heritage grants now? Just out of curiosity.

Dr. Kirby Godsey: They are part of the unrestricted budget of the university, and all I'm saying is that in the priorities of the university we will have to make some reductions. But in the priorities of making reductions, they will not come from student scholarships. That's what we're saying.

Presumed Female Individual: Okay. My second question is in regards to the teachers. I value opinionated teachers. I think it enhances my education. And one of the things out of this situation was my major concern. My first concern was the status of the teaching positions of several teachers who decided to print their names, in that article of *The Cluster*. I was wondering if their positions were in jeopardy because they decided to be a union agent.

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Absolutely not. Yes. In no way.

Presumed Female Individual: Doctor Godsey, you said that people who currently have a GBC scholarship will not be affected. What about incoming students who would have qualified for those same scholarships?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Well, let me say, our scholarships and our scholarship resources will not be reduced. So what we award in scholarships will not be reduced. Certainly, over the years, we will, we will have to, look at what our priorities are, scholarship. One of our priorities has been supporting the students that come to Mercer. I expect that will continue to be a priority for Mercer. Whether that will be adapted years to come, I can't say with absolute clarity. But the monies that are owed, the student scholarship will not be reduced.

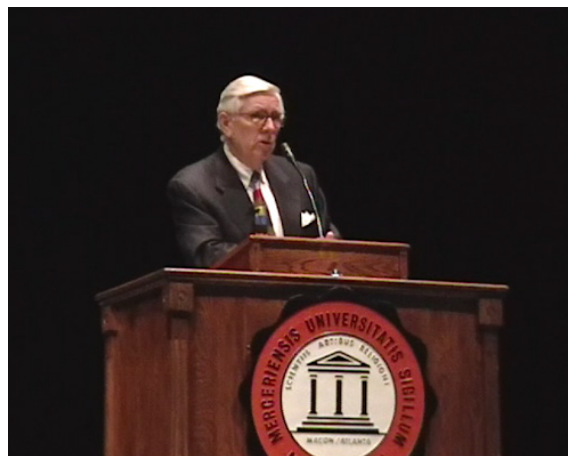
Presumed Female Individual: Hi. My question is in regards to the presidency selection. And I guess it's a two part question. My first question is how has this decision changed or how did it affect the presidency selection? I'm not sure how far along it's gone. But being that you're, my second question is being that you're going to retire in, I think, June of next year. How will you continue to assist with this process?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: This action will have no effect on the presidential selection process. The trustees have a presidential search committee that is well along in its work. And, I think this action will simply have certainly been explained to any candidate that is coming to Mercer. But, I don't expect any changes, policy in the university with, because of a change of presidential leadership. Maybe there you'll have a new leader here that will be guiding the university. But I'm absolutely confident that Mercer's commitment to academic independence and the commitment to, of the autonomy of the board, will remain, unchanged in the, in the years ahead.

Presumed Male Individual: I just have a question regarding MTS, basically. I know you've assured me that the right to have discussion will be protected at Mercer University. But at the same time, it seems that MTS has been essentially forced to disband. I understand that that's to help with the negotiations, negotiations with the GBC. But what kind of timeline do you see before a group like that or with similar goals would be allowed to reform, if at all, at Mercer University?

Dr. Kirby Godsey: Let me say, in the first place, the MTS was not forced to go out to stop operating. That was a decision that came out of discussion between members of MTS, leaders of MTS, faculty members, and the provost's office. And they made a decision that MTS would stand down. Now I appreciate their doing so. I appreciate they were really taking action to try to be helpful, I think, to the university. The issue was not that what they were doing was wrong, but it was a distraction in the sense that it was becoming the focus of the agenda. The real focus here has never been emptied yet. And for people to assume, and even some of the newspaper articles gave us the impression, that was the principal issue. Let me assure you, it was not the principal issue. The principal issue has to do with governance of the university, academic independence of the university. And, but MTS tended to become a focus, for that, for those conversations. Now we're in over the next several months, we're in a bit of a sensitive time of trying to negotiate, this, this separation. I too would not like to have to be, have people preoccupied with this distraction with this distraction. At the same time, I don't wish to communicate in any way that there are issues, even though there are issues.

END



What Mercer Will Do

Looking forward into spring semester of 2006, as Doctor Godsey stated in his address to the University, The Georgia Baptist Convention finalized their vote to sever ties with the University on November 15th, 2006⁸² bringing their 172 years relationship to its end. This was a year after control over Shorter College had been given to the GBC per the Georgia Supreme Court's decision. The following month on January 19th through the 20th, Mercer University hosted for the first time ever a 'Baptist Summit' conference on Macon campus. They had effectively announced their independence. Dr. Kirby Godsey gave his speech, "The Mercer Experience: The Convergence of the Mercer Idea and the Baptist Idea" reaffirming Mercer University's priorities in education and continuing forward without the convention.⁸³

In his speech, Doctor Godsey denies that the university will ever support alternative life-styles, such as identifying as gay, and that there was never and will never be a celebration of 'Coming Out Day' at Mercer University. As we know there was a celebration on October 11th 2005 and there would be future celebrations after the severance of this community holiday of acceptance. The University itself did not and has not to this day acknowledged the celebration of 'Coming Out Day', that is true. However students, faculty and Maconites have recognized the holiday. Doctor Godsey's address appears almost contradictory when seen cross compared to his speech on November 21st and of the accounts from interviewees that were present during the events that took place in 2005. Somehow the beliefs and acceptance of LGBTQ+ students and populations is lessened and more bureaucratically accessed by the president. He offered respect but not acceptance in his addresses and previous speeches. This is not an assessment of the President's current beliefs or summaries of the events of the severance. It seems to be the misfortune of historical context, bureaucratic expectations and progress yet to be made towards acceptance of all LGBTQ+ people.

⁸² About the Author Gerald Harris and Gerald Harris, "Ga.. Baptists Vote Overwhelmingly to Sever Ties to Mercer Univ.," Baptist Press, November 16, 2005, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/ga-baptists-vote-overwhelmingly-to-sever-ties-to-mercer-univ/>.

⁸³ The Triangle Symposium, "The Mercer Experience: The Convergence of the Mercer Idea and the Baptist Idea" Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

The Mercer Experience: The Convergence of the Mercer Idea and the Baptist Idea ⁸⁴

**R. Kirby Godsey
BAPTIST SUMMIT
January 19 and 20, 2006**

As I call this gathering to order, I want to thank you for joining us at the first “Baptist Summit” to be held at Mercer University. This summit is the beginning of what we want to be a continuing conversation and we are delighted that you have chosen to engage in this dialogue about the future of Mercer’s Baptist identity. At the very outset, let me reaffirm that Mercer is a Baptist university. That reality can never be changed by the action of a convention. Further, it is our intention and commitment to strengthen our Baptist identity, and to relate even more closely to Baptists. I believe that we should chart our course toward becoming the premier Baptist university in the nation, serving as an intellectual beacon in the life of Baptists and serving Baptists and Baptist students throughout the world - religious freedom, intellectual freedom, and structures of governance. Surely we have some gay students at Mercer. To be candid, we have about the same percentage of gay students at Mercer as you have in your congregations.

Even so, I want to talk about the issues of gay and lesbian lifestyle, and how these matters relate to the University. Because, there are no subjects out of bounds for our conversations. Let me say, first and foremost, that Mercer is, and intends to be in the future, a community of respect. That is our character as a university community. That means we will act with civility and respect towards all people fundamentalist and liberal, gay and straight, Black and Hispanic. No credentials are required in order to be treated with respect at Mercer. Our boundaries are wide. Our embrace is generous. I trust that we will not respect any person that Jesus would not respect. We will not accept any person that we do not believe Jesus would accept. Now, did Mercer have a “coming out” day? The answer is “No.” The nation has a so-called “coming out” day every year. It is not a day that we called or created, espouse or endorse. We have a day for almost everything in this country.

On this day that gains such national media attention, Mercer students decided to have a forum - a forum - not a novel idea for a university. At this forum, students could submit in writing questions which a panel could discuss and even debate for an hour about gay and lesbian issues. Now, I understand that some people were uneasy, even frightened, that we would be discussing these issues, especially on that day, for fear that we would be seen as advocating, or endorsing, or encouraging a lifestyle. Not so, of course. But please understand that Mercer is a place for discussion and debate. We cannot realistically rule out certain arenas of debate because of fear that their mere mention may give people the idea that we are advocating a lifestyle. We stand for open inquiry. We stand for truth-seeking and truth-telling. We stand for the dignity and the worth of every person. We stand for respect.

⁸⁴ The Triangle Symposium, “The Mercer Experience: The Convergence of the Mercer Idea and the Baptist Idea” Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

Now, I say to you, what better place is there to discuss the difficult gay issue than in a symposium at an avowedly Christian university? Otherwise, we leave such discussions to the back rooms and hallways, and the dark shadows. Affirming individuals and affirming the right to seek understanding should not be confused with affirming or advocating alternate lifestyles. And again, I say to you, what better context for thoughtful discussion of such controversial and troubling matters than a University forum? Otherwise, we leave our young people to be informed about their inner questions by the Internet, by the newspapers, and by Will and Grace. We can do better than that. So, let me summarize explicitly, and I hope without equivocation, what Mercer will and will not do regarding this issue of homosexuality. First, let me tell you what we will not do:

1. Mercer has not been and will not be an advocate for alternative life-styles.
2. Mercer will not allow pornographic links on Mercer organizations.
3. Mercer will not have coming-out days. By the way, Mercer has never had a coming out day!

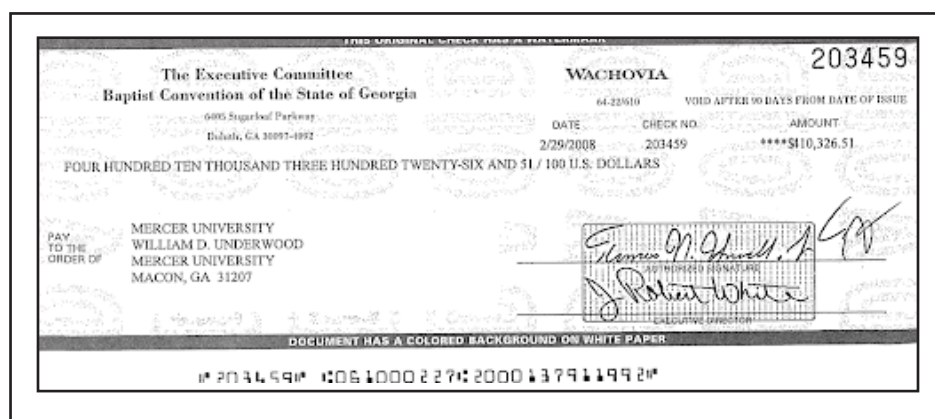
Second, let me outline what Mercer will do:

1. Mercer will be an educational institution. We are not a church, but that does not mean that we are not keenly aware of our churchly constituency. They are some of our dearest friends. Surely, we will not always agree, but we will always be open to listen.
2. Mercer will permit dialogue and discussion on all issues that impact society and culture. Our students will be permitted to talk about issues of sexuality, in the same way that those issues are being discussed in some Baptist churches. Are we freer than most Baptist churches to discuss these matters? Yes. And we must be. That is the nature of an educational institution.
3. Student organizations such as the Mercer Triangle Symposium will exist in some form, not to advocate lifestyles, but to search for understanding. In fact, the published purpose of the Mercer Triangle Symposium was very clear that it did not advocate a gay lifestyle. Their stated purpose was “to provide an open forum to discuss political, theological, social, and academic issues relating to sexuality.” Mercer has not been or will not be advocating or endorsing an alternate lifestyle. We will be affirming the primacy and the sanctity of family. We will certainly have faculty and students, members of this community, who believe that gays and lesbians should be accorded the same rights as others in our society. Encouraging discussion and debate about the rights of gays should not be confused as advocating a gay lifestyle.

In my view, that is what Mercer can and cannot do. I hope this summary will be helpful for understanding Mercer’s role in addressing these difficult and controversial matters.

Last Known Check to Mercer University

Our researchers whilst scouring the archives at Mercer University came across an undeniable copy of a check. The check was written for February 29th, 2008 and the amount was for \$410,326.51, nearly half a million dollars (footnote). A drop in the bucket compared to the millions Mercer had received in previous years while under the Georgia Baptist Convention. It is presumed that this money was given to subsidize any students who were enrolled prior to the severance and were receiving scholarships from the convention. It is not confirmed if this was the final check from the Georgia Baptist Convention but the last known.



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⁸⁵ The Triangle Symposium, "The Executive Committee Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia: Check" Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

The Aftermath of the Split

Around this time, April Trussell-Smith wrote a letter to her Baptist parents to be published in *The Cluster*.⁸⁶ In this letter, Trussell wrote to her Baptist mother explaining what she had been working on with MTS that semester and why she was so passionate about it, relating that passion back to her Baptist background.

“Probably, it just felt more like, if I was going to come out publicly and put my name publicly in the way that I had been avoiding, that my family should be who I told first, I guess.”⁸⁷

Trussell also noted that Alex Morrison received pushback from *The Cluster*’s advisor when he published the letter, because it “wasn’t journalism.”⁸⁸

Think for yourself College campuses medium for wisdom

By Alex Morrison
Editor in Chief
Joseph Morrison

Needless to say, Mercer is a Baptist school. Barring any connotations, you can discern that the Bible plays a significant role in the formulation of the institution. The connotations come in the interpretation of the sacred document.

I believe that most of the controversy with Mercer and its Baptist Heritage is found just in what the words mean, not whether or not the Bible is sacred.

Just to be clear, we have to draw a distinction between the institution and the individuals that comprise the student and faculty bodies. The distinction is fundamentally clear. The institution is in charge of laying down what is to be taught and what themes are to be suggested. Faculty certainly have some say in this, but would be called to fault the instant a complaint was raised about objectivity.

With the disbandment of Mercer Triangle Symposium, a group designed to promote dialogue about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students thus affirming their standing as members of the general populace, we see a blatant disregard for this fact. Several articles have pointed to Georgia Baptist Conventions opposition to two Christianity professors signing a petition saying that they support LGBT. I would posit that the two professors were just doing what Jesus Christ would have done—express love for them.

We must also remember that MTS is a student organization. A university cannot be faulted for the ideas that students have,

informed these perceptions. Students have the right to think what they will and become educated about issues so that they can have conjectures or what would appear to be right opinion. The education does not alter people—it strengthens people. The strength must be carried to the greatest forum that has ever existed, the college campus. Let students guide students and influence them, the college campus simply is a medium. The university does not enable them, the youth and thirst for knowledge does.

Why inhibit one group from seeking wisdom at the one place that wisdom should be sought?

With the action of the GBC, this question becomes irrelevant. The question that sparks the mind is why would this happen.

The issue rests simply with image, nothing more. While Mercer was concerned about image with MTS, the GBC is concerned about its image in regards to Mercer.

Mercer is liberal, mainly in its interpretation of scriptures and how it teaches courses. Liberal arts—sounds familiar doesn’t it? The convention seems to have a problem with the fact that students at Mercer demand what education really is about. The last thing they would want is a group of people who can think for themselves.

I am simply thinking for myself here, and I encourage you to do the same. Use your power of reason to make heads of tails of this.

My simple opinion is that both Mercer and the GBC will be better off now. They can each begin to think for themselves. The GBC can start focusing on winning souls to Christ and Mercer can enjoy its free inquiry. Both parties just need to remember that it is God they serve, not money or image.

In addition to this open letter, a letter signed as from “Georgia Baptist Parents” addressing the split was also published in *The Cluster*.⁸⁹ The letter critiqued the GBC for their decision to split and explained that college is supposed to be a place where students expand and challenge their knowledge and beliefs, not be pushed down a path of thinking by the university. “We sent our daughter to Mercer to be educated, not indoctrinated,” the authors stated. It was later revealed that the authors of this piece were the parents of Dr. G. Beth Sherouse, the first official president of MTS.⁹⁰

Alex Morrison, editor-in-chief of *The Cluster* and a speaker at the We Are Mercer event, also wrote an article addressing the issue.⁹¹ He reiterated the point brought up by others regarding universities being a place to encourage higher thinking and the formation of opinions based on this. Morrison stated that Mercer students just wanted to have this environment of higher learning, but the GBC did not want “a group of people who can think for themselves.”

⁸⁶ April Trussell, “Building character through challenges,” *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

⁸⁷ April Trussell, “Building character through challenges,” *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

⁸⁸ April Trussell, “Building character through challenges,” *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

⁸⁹ Baptist Parents, “Parents ‘deeply disturbed’ by GBC break,” *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

⁹⁰ G. Beth Sherouse, interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 3, 2024.]

⁹¹ Alex Morrison, “Think for yourself,” *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

"Let students guide students and influence them, the college campus simply is a medium," he stated, "The university does not enable them, the youth and thirst for knowledge does."

While, as seen by the We Are Mercer event, many Mercer students came together during this time, there were Baptist students who spoke out against Mercer and sided with the GBC. For example, a student writer for The Cluster published a piece where he compared Mercer to the show Mr. Roger's Neighborhood and the GBC to a financial contributor to the show.⁹² He described a scenario in which Mr. Rogers began behaving negatively to the point where the contributor had to stop supporting the show due to concern for the children watching. The student stated that Mercer did not care about the children attending the university and was "corrupting the Christian image," and the GBC was thinking of those children when severing ties. Other students were upset and concerned, with one student stating that MTS should have thought more about the repercussions of a Coming Out Day event. Another stated that they felt the event was "inappropriate" due to Mercer's Baptist affiliation and that many other students at Mercer were not happy about the event occurring.⁹³

Overall, quotes from students included in The Cluster seem to indicate that most students were worried or upset about the separation but understood why it happened.⁹⁴ One student expressed hope that students would feel more free to speak their minds without fear of repercussions from the GBC.⁹⁵

How do you feel about the decision of the GBC to sever ties with Mercer?



"I agree with the decision because the Georgia Baptist Convention's values and Mercer's values don't line up. So, it would be good to remove the name and the affiliation."
-Zac Borreson

"It's different for me because I don't receive a Baptist scholarship. I do think it's ridiculous for them to pull out. It seems to affect a lot of students."
-Lauren O'Byrne



"I am sorry that they had to pull out, but I understand their reasons. I just hope that Mercer doesn't let these severed ties distract them from their Christian beliefs."
-Jesse McMillan

"I think that it's been a good relationship that we have had and I know that Mercer will hold fast to Baptist heritage. While we can't control the actions of the convention, we can only hope that they will make the best decisions for themselves and Mercer. I am confident that Mercer will be successful."
-Amy Kenney



⁹² Shane Gottwals, "Baptist students better off elsewhere?" *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

⁹³ The Triangle Symposium, page 8. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

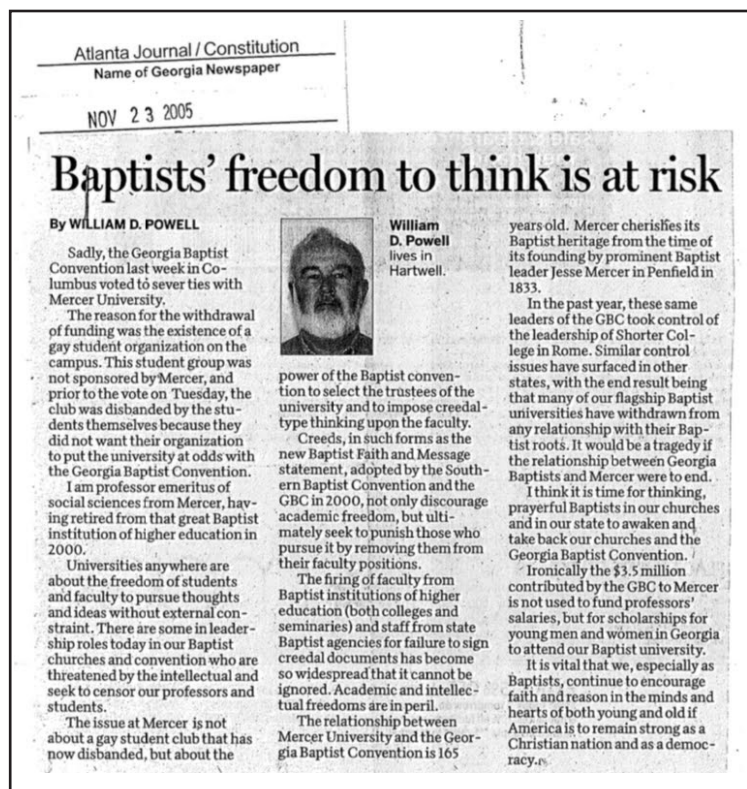
⁹⁴ The Cluster, "How do you feel about the decision of the GBC to sever ties with Mercer?" *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

⁹⁵ The Triangle Symposium, page 8. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

⁹⁶ The Cluster, "How do you feel about the decision of the GBC to sever ties with Mercer?" *The Cluster*, (Macon, GA).

Timothy Durski reflected on the aftermath of the “We Are Mercer” rally, stating, “I wanna say we went to lunch afterwards, and we always sat kind of in the same corner of the cafeteria. And there were a lot of students from the Baptist Student Union there. And, we spent that lunch arguing with them over why what we did was the right thing to do, and why how they felt while acknowledged was the wrong way to feel . . . I seem to remember talking with them and really vigorously debating this. You know, the problem was that it seemed a very simple moral issue to us at the time. The fact that what we saw as this sort of titanic organization, this sort of nebulous shadowy group of people, were, making a decision, an institutional decision, and scapegoating students. They were, diverting all blame from theirs from themselves. This was both the GBC leadership and Mercer’s own leadership were trying to divert blame, and all of them were pointing to this group of students. And suddenly, these students who are just trying to keep their heads down, are exposed and are targets for a lot of the, anxiety and animosity that was stirred up by this cut, and that was a problem.”⁹⁷

One retired Mercer professor wrote an article for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* where he expressed concern over the GBC seeking to, and succeeding in many cases, control Georgia universities.⁹⁸ He referenced creeds adopted by the GBC and SBC that he said opposed academic freedom and cases in which professors were fired if they did not support this creed. The Mercer professor expressed sorrow over Mercer and other Baptist universities leaving their state conventions due to this kind of control and urged Georgia Baptists to fight against this rhetoric and “take back” the GBC so Mercer and other schools would not be forced to move away from their Baptist roots in order to preserve academic freedom. A Mercer alumni and pastor also critiqued the GBC for how conservative it was becoming and expressed respect towards Mercer for continuing to solidify itself as a successful academic institution.⁹⁹ He believed Mercer’s McAfee School of Theology was not receiving the credit it deserved because of the ideology of the GBC turning people away. He ended his article by stating, “Thank you for allowing us to go our separate ways.” We reached out to the alumni mentioned in these articles for an interview, but we were not able to get in contact.



⁹⁷ Timothy Durski interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [April 17, 2024.]

⁹⁸ William D. Powell, “Baptists’ freedom to think is at risk,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, (Atlanta, GA), Nov. 23, 2005.

⁹⁹ C. Joshua Villines, “Good decision to sever ties with Mercer,” Nov. 18, 2005.

In the Macon community as a whole, there seemed to be mixed opinions regarding the split. In the results of a poll featured in *The Telegraph*, fifty-two percent of respondents said that they thought the GBC should cut ties with Mercer, forty-four percent said they should not, and four percent were unsure.¹⁰⁰ Macon pastor Eddie D. Smith Sr. stated that he felt the GBC “pulled away too far to the right and found itself in self-righteous mode . . . I really believe it’s almost a political move now, rather than a spiritual one.”¹⁰¹

Throughout Georgia, there also seemed to be mixed opinions from Baptists regarding the split.¹⁰² Some condemned Mercer for its “liberalism,” for hosting a Coming Out Day, and for Godsey’s religious stances, while others were pleased with the split because they saw it as Mercer breaking free from the fundamentalist control of the GBC and continuing to grow as a university.

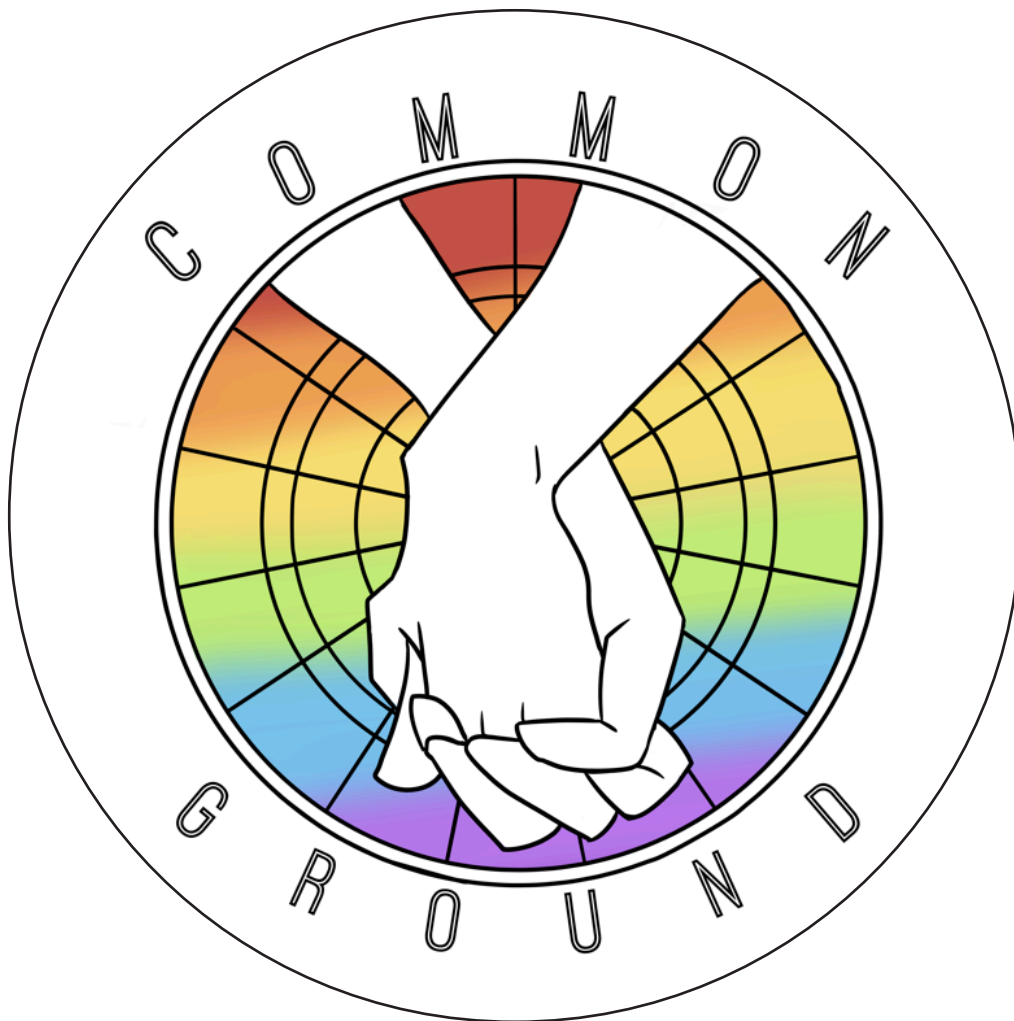
¹⁰⁰ The Triangle Symposium, page 18. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA

¹⁰¹ Bernie O'Donnell, “Baptists, prepare for split,” *The Telegraph*, (Macon, GA), Nov. 17, 2005.

¹⁰² Georgia Baptist Convention/Mercer Split, pages 37-38. Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

Common Ground Forms

With the controversial nature surrounding the 2006 severance between Mercer University and the Georgia Baptist Convention, April Trussell-Smith, Dr. Elizabeth Sherouse, and other members of the Mercer Triangle Symposium were pressured by the university to disband the club. However, some members of MTS were determined to keep the cause alive. The year after MTS disbanded, Common Ground formed. According to Noah Maier's interview, Michael Emil was president around the time he came to Mercer.¹ Maier first became the treasurer and was later named president of the club. In his interview, Maier mentioned a brief discussion between him and Beth Sherouse where they discussed changing Common Ground's name to something along the lines of "queer-straight alliance." However, due to opposition from faculty and allies, as well as the word "queer" being considered derogatory at the time, this idea was dropped.



¹⁰³ Noah Maier interview by Bekehm Mohn, Mercer University, [May 28, 2024.]

A Timeline of Significant Events 2008-2024

Protesters rally against ban on gay marriage

BY ASHLEY TUSAN JOYNER
ajoyner@macon.com

In Macon on Saturday, more than 50 advocates for Join the Impact, an international organization supporting equal rights for people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, protested the California Proposition 8 vote outside City Hall.

Protesters waved signs reading "What Would Martin Do?" "Fight the H8" and "Would You Rather I Marry Your Daughter?"

Gatherers ranged in age and race. Some wore the traditional rainbow colors, expressing pride in their homosexuality. Others wore plain clothes and clergy attire.

The event, which began at 1:30 p.m., was part of a nationwide protest against Proposition 8, which passed Nov. 4 and which defines marriage in California as between a man and a woman. A similar protest took place at the same time at Atlanta City Hall.

"Today's protest is a small piece of the puzzle," said Alex Webb, organizer of the Macon rally. "This started off as an online movement and has become a national and international phenomenon. There are people in London standing with us right now ... standing with us against our treatment as second-class citizens, standing for equal rights for all."

Please see RALLY, 3B

2008: "Join the Impact" was an LGBT+ advocacy group for supporting gay marriage. On November 16, fifty advocates joined in Macon to rally against banning same-sex marriage.¹ The rally was part of a national protest against a policy titled "Proposition 8" passed in California, defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Mercer students were seen in attendance. Mary Kathryn Wiley was a nineteen year old English major who attended with six of her friends and stated that she and Mercerians were disappointed by the passing of Proposition 8. Phillip Sinclair was also present, the co-owner of Club Synergy, a well known gay club in downtown Macon (refer to page 29 to learn more about LGBT+ nightlife in Macon).

RALLY

Continued from 1B

Several college students from Mercer University and Wesleyan College participated.

"We on campus were really disappointed by the outcome of Prop 8," said Mary Kathryn Wiley, a 19-year-old English major at Mercer.

Wiley attended the protest with six friends — five of whom, like her, said they were straight.

"This is a civil rights issue," she said.

Presently Georgia law prohibits same sex marriage and does not recognize those entered into it in other states.

At a point, the group grew in size and Macon police officers instructed the protesters to relocate to the park across Washington Avenue.

There, Phillip Sinclair, co-owner of Club Synergy on Cherry Street, addressed the crowd.

"Rain or shine, our community will take to the streets to get the word out that equality is a human right and one that we will not stop working

toward until it's afforded to all citizens," he said, quoting Willow Witte, Join the Impact's co-founder and organizer.

Rene Sanchez and his wife, Minerva, who have been married for more than three decades, protested for their gay son and other people they meet while directing Macon's chapter of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

"We feel it's important that just as we have been married for 32 years that he and others have that chance. Folks don't realize that the marriage we're talking about is civil marriage. It's not a traditional religious marriage between a man and a woman," Sanchez said. "Civil unions are a very poor substitute. They vary from state to state. The amount of privileges and rights, such as health insurance and other benefits, are far less than those granted to married couples by institutions and employers."

"People don't realize the issue here. They just get hung up on the word marriage."

To contact writer Ashley Tusan Joyner, call 744-4347.

2011: On November 5, it was announced that Mercer University updated its Health and Dental insurance to include same-sex partner benefits to faculty and staff.² President William D. Underwood implemented the policy after an annual faculty meeting the previous semester. Other institutions such as Wake Forest University, Emory University, Duke University, and Furman University already offered their employees same-sex partner benefits. The policy aligned with Mercer's "non-discrimination policy" which included protections for LGB identifying employees.

11-5-11 1B

Same-sex partners get benefits

Change in policy to take effect immediately

By ANDREA CASTILLO
acastillo@macon.com

insurance, as well as other benefits, to same-sex partners of its employees.

President Bill Underwood approved the policy to extend same-sex domestic partner benefits, including benefits such as tuition waivers, to eligible other universities and con-

ble employees Oct. 28, taking effect immediately.

The move follows a months-long process that started in the spring, when a committee of faculty and staff members looked at similar policies at other universities and con-

sidered the legal, financial and ethical implications of doing so, according to Larry Brunley, Mercer's chief of staff.

The committee found that other private universities in the South, such as Emory, Vanderbilt and Duke, already had similar policies in place.

The move makes Mercer more competitive recruiting and retaining faculty Brunley said. The matter has been one brought up increasingly by prospective employees.

Offering benefits to same sex partners of its employ

Underwood

SEE BENEFITS, 7B

¹ "Protesters rally against ban on gay marriage". November 16, 2008, Macon Telegraph, 1b Macon, Ga, [Subject Folder]: "Mercer Triangle Symposium - 2005" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA,

² "Same-sex Partners get Benefits". November 5th, 2011, Macon Telegraph, 1b Macon, Ga, [Subject Folder]: "Mercer Triangle Symposium - 2005" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA,



2015: In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court legalizing same-sex marriage on June 26, Macon had heaps of couples flocking to the court house to officially tie the knot. One of the first churches to officiate an LGBT+ wedding was the First Baptist Church of Christ on Friday on February 16, 2018. The wedding brought together Thomas Bullington and Jeff Whatley in holy union. Later that year, Dr. Godsey's son Hunter Godsey was wedded to his husband Jon Simpson on May 5.

Both weddings were met with support from the congregation and were seen as a sign of acceptance in the Southern Baptist community. This marked a significant milestone in the fight for LGBT+ rights in the church. These events demonstrate that being queer and being Baptist are not mutually exclusive, showing that individuals can embrace both their faith and their identity. This acceptance represents a shift in the traditional views of many religious communities, fostering inclusivity and understanding.

2017: Cefari Langford and McPherson Newell were the executive leaders of Common Ground when they launched a training program called Rainbow Connection to help educate Mercer faculty, staff, and students on LGBT+ topics.⁴ Topics included microaggressions, intersectionality, use of pronouns, and appropriate versus outdated terminology. On January 23, 2018, Rainbow Connection opened itself to applicants. James Stair was the co-chair at the time and stated that the goal of the committee was “ensuring conscious and empathetic communication between professors, student leaders, and Mercer students within the LGBTQ+ community.” The manual and teaching guide had been updated nearly every semester based on questions asked in workshops and training. In 2019, the training took an online format to be accessed by anyone interested.

<https://merceru.instructure.com/enroll/H4RAL7>

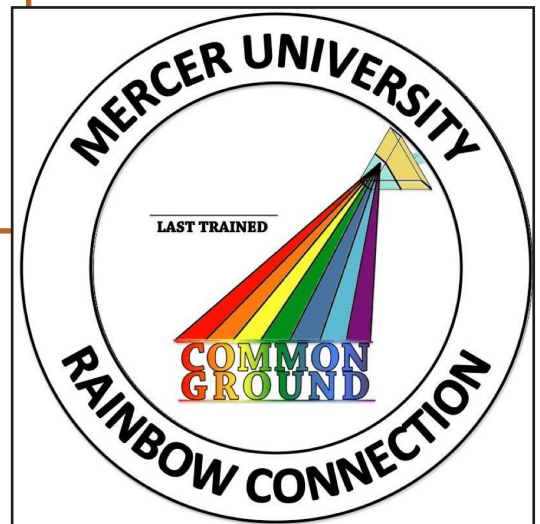
³ Dsto Moore, “dsto,” Linktree, https://linktr.ee/dsto?utm_source=linktree_profile_share&tsid=8abd5a68-a3a3-435e-9cc7-158c68d55e87. “Jeff Whatley Thomas Bullington in front of First Baptist Church of Christ”, Tuesday, September 17, 2023.

⁴ Andrea Honaker “Students Helping Mercer Become More Affirming with LGBTQ Sensitivity Training,” Mercer University, <https://den.mercer.edu/students-helping-mercer-become-more-affirming-with-lgbtq-sensitivity-training/>.

The Rainbow Connection committee was active until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted in-person attendance. At the time of this publication, the committee is inactive. Below is a list of members and leaders of the committee from according to training manuals from 2017 to 2020 :

Mcpherson Newell, President
Noah Maier, President
Khoi Le, Vice President
Alesha Chapman, Diversity Chair
Staci Wood, Treasurer
Carter Cagle, Secretary
Cefari Langford
Sanaa Yusuf, Vice President (2021 -2022)
Alana Murray, President (2024- 2025)

The Mercer Archives now has access to previous training guides that can be accessed online and in-person via appointment.



2018: Common Ground executives Xan Hard and Iris Hart were determined to have a drag show at Mercer University. Unfortunately they could not get permission from administration to hold the event on campus. Xan stated,⁵

Our first drag show had to be held off campus, because at the time we were told that the administration was unsure if we could hold an event like that on campus. And also, we were told that we couldn't even advertise for it on campus um and so it was very much a word-of-mouth situation, but like lots of people showed up to the very first one that we held at the Crazy Bull and it was wonderful”⁶



⁵ Xan Hart, interview by Raven Dupree, Mercer University, [April 20, 2024].

⁶ Self Portrait of Xan Hart, Image of Tanginer Summers in Rehearsal, Xan Hart giving speech, Iris Hart and friend, 2019, donated by Xan Hart



Being restricted by administration and the atmosphere, the event was taken off-campus to a venue known as the Crazy Bull, where Tangerine Summers agreed to perform. Iris Hart performed as her drag persona “Bubbleyum.” The venue was packed and well attended to the point students and interested viewers had to be turned away for lack of space.



2019: The Office of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives is created for the 2019-2020 academic year.⁸ The council claimed to work closely to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion practices that support and accelerate the university’s overall mission, vision, and heritage. Strategic accountability for results is created, governance and oversight is provided, and communication about progress is promoted across the university. Furthermore, it helps foster institutional change, establish diversity, inclusion, and equity priorities, and manage diversity and inclusion programs and initiatives across all campuses.



⁷ Crowd in Penfield for First on Campus Drag Show, 2019, donated by Xan Hart

⁸ Dr. Ansley Booker “New Year , New Beginnings, and a New Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council,” Mercer University, January 14, 2021, <https://den.mercer.edu/new-year-new-beginnings-and-a-new-diversity-and-inclusion-advisory-council/>.

2019: On March 30, Mercer University held its first Drag Show on campus. Common Ground, Campus Life, Project Equality, and the Mercer University School of Medicine's Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) hosted and planned the show. The show took place in Penfield Hall. Five Mercer students performed. Tangerine Summers, the "oldest drag queen in Macon" performed twice (See page 52 for more information about her legacy). All tips and donations were given to Macon HOPE Center, a center dedicated to serving those living with HIV and AIDS. The show raised \$350. Common Ground and its executives planned to hold an additional drag show the following year, but it transitioned to an online format due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Xan described this difficult format when we interviewed him:

During the pandemic, we ended up doing the show but virtually, um and so I spent like a solid twenty four hours editing our virtual drag show together after what felt like, you know, hours of recording each individual show and then putting it together, which was a crazy, wild time. Um but we did it and you know we all just to keep the flame of this part of queer identity alive (Hart, 2024).

2020: Mercer URGE (Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity) hosted "GIH Pajama Party" on March 12, an informational event to advocate for Mercer University's adoption of gender-inclusive residence halls.⁹ Supporters crafted and discussed what gender-inclusive housing would look like for the community, and Mercer students expressed the need for it. Other schools in Georgia had already successfully implemented such housing. Mercer students James Stair, Jessica Smith, and Adri Rosario advocated for this implementation. Rosario remarked that Stair's research on the topic "had two years worth of just plain numbers, like a lot of data. And it was kind of wild to me that Mercer emphasizes doing research that reaches out, and yet he was stifled in his research that would actually get something implemented on campus." Students expressed being deeply disappointed in Mercer for not having this already implemented to create a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ identifying people. At the time of this publication, there is no data from 2013-2024 by the Institutional Effectiveness office nor any other office where data is collected on gender or sexual orientation data of students, faculty, or staff. Additionally, Mercer University has not adopted any form of gender inclusive housing for students.

⁹ Mary Helene Hall "Initiative for Gender Inclusive Housing Takes Off," Mercer Cluster, April 2020, <https://www.mercercluster.com/article/2020/04/initiative-for-gender-inclusive-housing-takes-off>.

2021: First-year student Bekehm Mohn noticed a lack of trans-inclusive policy at Mercer. They began advocating for a “Preferred Name Policy.” They created the My Name Matters Campaign, ran their advocacy under this campaign, and reached out to Mercerians on popular social media app Instagram. Mohn gathered student, faculty, and staff statements regarding this and asked for support in developing a policy. They worked with Rainbow Connection representative Sana. They met with Information Technology (IT), Title X, and the dean of students regarding this issue. Mohn gathered the statement, provided a potential proposal format, a list of colleges with this kind of policy implemented, and a dissertation discussing the importance of trans-inclusive policies within universities. The dissertation was written by Stephanie Mooring and titled “Transgender Student Perceptions of Institutional Approaches that Facilitate Persistence and Graduation.” This dissertation and all relevant documents can be found in the Mercer Archives for viewing.



According to the IT services of Mercer University, the preferred name change must be made and completed within the student system before the instructor prints his or her roster, then the preferred name is visible. There were no statistics available to request from IT regarding the number of students, faculty or staff utilizing the policy. As far as IT is aware, there haven't been technological issues regarding the policy.

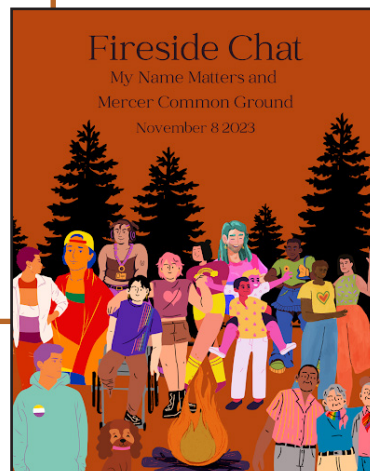
2021: Common Ground executives Ren and Tori Glazier held a “Coming Out Day” celebration on October 11, the first since 2006.



2022: The Preferred/Chosen Name Policy was implemented across all campuses in August. The policy stated, “Mercer University recognizes that individuals may wish to be addressed by names other than their legal first names. For this reason, the University allows students, faculty, and staff to request a preferred or chosen first name to be used wherever reasonably possible. If a preferred or chosen first name is not used, an individual’s legal name will continue to appear in all University systems.”

2023: The My Name Matters Campaign launched a new initiative inspired by Bekehm Mohn’s previous involvement with Mercer’s Integration Museum that was displayed in the fall of 2023. Gathering the skills they had learned from researching history and utilizing the University Archives, they decided to research queer history at Mercer. To their awe, they found a rich and confusing history hidden away in folders and the minds of alumni past. Savannah French joined the initiative as they had worked with Mohn on the Integration Museum. They also recruited a team of students through Common Ground to work on the initiative. These students were Raven Dupree, Alyson Tidwell, Willow Crabtree, Gray Morrison, and Daniel Browne.

2023: Common Ground and the My Name Matter Campaign hosted a “Fireside Chat” on November 8 to gauge the interest of students and alumni regarding having a research project and book about LGBT+ history at Mercer. Alumni and students were excited to see a project in the works for this. The team gathered for the project then spent the entire fall semester researching the history.



2023: Common Ground hosted their annual “Pride Prom” on October 29. Voted prom royalty included Bekehm Mohn and two other students. For the sake of protection and privacy, names and images have been redacted but members of The My Name Matters Campaign have given permission to display photos of them and their attendance.



2024: In the month of April, the My Name Matters Campaign hosted viewing parties of archival footage from the “We are Mercer!” rally held on November 18, 2005. The viewing parties were held four times and included guest speakers Dr. Beth Sherouse and alumni Bentley Hudgins. Attendance was large and many students, faculty, and alumni discussed the footage and what its implications are on Mercer University and its inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community.



2024: On April 4, a Mercer student was arrested and charged with misdemeanor battery after confronting a speaker at a campus event.¹⁰ Mercer's Center for Economics and Liberty invited Jennifer Grossman for a Turning Point USA event. Her speech was titled "Putting the Capital Back in Capitalism." Grossman is the CEO of The Atlas Society. She is a well-known conservative and openly against the efforts in Palestine in the ongoing Gaza war. LGBT+ students were not happy to see Mercer sponsor Grossman and decided to protest outside the venue, Willet Science Center, during the event. They were promptly asked to leave by Mercer University Police.



2024: On May 1, nineteen years after the "We are Mercer!" student rally, Common Ground hosted an event on Cruz Plaza to ask Mercer University and its administration to respond to the war in Israel and to whom they sponsor as guest speakers on the campus.¹¹



¹⁰ Gabriel Kopp, Henry Keating, and Aditya Vayalapalli, "Lecture Erupts in Protest," Mercer Cluster, April 2024, <https://www.mercercluster.com/article/2024/04/lecture-erupts-in-protest>.

¹¹ Henry Keating and Eliza Moore, "Dead Day Protest: 5/1/2024," Mercer Cluster, May 2024, <https://www.mercercluster.com/article/2024/05/dead-day-protest-5-1-2024>.

Nex Benedict (They/He)
(January 11, 2008 -February 8, 2024)

13

Nex Benedict, a sixteen-year-old nonbinary Indigenous person, was attacked by a group of classmates in a restroom at their Oklahoma high school.¹² The school nurse did not recommend further examination, but a police officer advised the family to visit a medical facility. Nex was treated for their injuries as seen on body camera footage of the officer. They decided not to pursue any legal actions and Nex expressed having been bullied for a year prior to the confrontation. Nex was found dead the next day, prompting vigils and statements from LGBTQ+ rights organizations such as GLAAD and The Human Rights Campaign. They died by suicide according to the Oklahoma Medical Examiner's office. Allegedly, an overdose of prozac and benadryl was found in his system. Nex's family remains skeptical of the autopsy report. Sue Benedict, Nex's guardian, believes her child was bullied at school due to the influence of anti-trans legislation. President Joe Biden issued a statement expressing condolences and calling for an end to discrimination stating, "In memory of Nex, we must all recommit to our work to end discrimination and address the suicide crisis impacting too many nonbinary and transgender children."



The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights is investigating Owasso Public Schools for potential violations of Title IX and Title II after Benedict's death. The investigation aims to determine if civil rights laws were violated and it could lead to further action against the school district. At the time of this publication, the investigation is still ongoing. In the wake of her loss, Sue Benedict is still grieving. Her only wish is to have her child back.

¹² National LGBTQ Task Force, "Mourning Nex Benedict," Task Force, [date of publication if available], <https://www.thetaskforce.org/news/mourning-nex-benedict/>.

¹³ Vanessa Romo, "Family of Nonbinary Oklahoma Student Nex Benedict Speaks Out After Bullying-Related Death," NPR, March 15, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/15/1238780699/nex-benedict-nonbinary-oklahoma-death-bullying>.

Anti-LGBT+ Legislation

The broader implications of anti-trans legislation on students are profound and far-reaching. Such policies often create a hostile and unsafe environment for transgender and nonbinary students, leading to increased rates of bullying, mental health issues, and even suicide. These laws can also discourage schools from providing necessary support and resources, further marginalizing vulnerable students and exacerbating their struggles. Schools should strive to be inclusive and supportive of all students, regardless of their gender identity. They should create policies that protect all students from discrimination and ensure that they are able to access the same resources and support.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has provided an updated snapshot of the increasing number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills advanced by lawmakers in state legislatures.¹⁴ These bills are part of a negative legislative climate that aims to oppress LGBTQ+ people and their rights. In 2023, a record-breaking seventy anti-LGBTQ laws were enacted, including bans on gender-affirming care for transgender youth, misgendering of transgender students, targeting of drag performances, and creating licenses to discriminate. The number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced has surpassed the previous five years, with a focus on LGBTQ erasure bills that strip away legal protections and rights for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Bently Hudgins, a Mercer alumni, was part of the efforts to block the passage of anti-LGBTQ+ bills in the state of Georgia.¹⁵ In the final days of the 2023-2024 legislative session, in March 2024, Make America Great Again (MAGA) lawmakers stuffed anti-LGBTQ+ amendments into two unrelated bills. There was no vote in the House of Representatives on either bill. There have been a number of Republican-majority states where anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has stalled this year, including Georgia. Several laws were passed by Georgia lawmakers banning transgender students from school bathrooms, imposing sex education restrictions, and restricting access to healthcare. As a result of months of organizing, the Human Rights Campaign and partner organizations were able to defeat anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. There are a growing number of multinational companies making their voices heard against anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Over one hundred large employers have signed on to the Count Us In Pledge to ensure that their transgender and nonbinary workers have access to healthcare. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce and Metro Atlanta Chamber opposed Senate Bill 180 because it would have permitted religious belief to be used as a justification for violating civil rights.

In addition to anti-LGBT+ legislation being passed across the country, the education system has also begun to be censored in recent years. There is often an intersection between book bans and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, especially as literature featuring LGBTQ+ characters or themes is targeted for censorship.¹⁶ Books including person of color (POC) representation have also been impacted. As a result of societal prejudices, such bans reflect objections to the representation of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. In addition to restricting access to diverse perspectives, these actions reinforce stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. As a result of the suppression of LGBTQ+ inclusive books, important conversations can be stifled, contributing to a culture of exclusion that undermines efforts toward acceptance and equality. A commitment to intellectual freedom as well as the promotion of diverse, inclusive narratives is needed to address both issues. Hence we have dedicated to protecting archived material and stories of LGBTQ+ history at our university and the broader Macon area.

¹⁴ Cullen Peele, "Roundup of Anti-LGBTQ Legislation Advancing in States Across the Country," Human Rights Campaign, [date of publication if available], <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/roundup-of-anti-lgbtq-legislation-advancing-in-states-across-the-country>.

¹⁵ Brandon Wolf, "The Turning Tide: Every Anti-LGBTQ Bill Defeated as Georgia Session Ends," Human Rights Campaign, [date of publication if available], <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/the-turning-tide-every-anti-lgbtq-bill-defeated-as-georgia-session-ends>.

¹⁶ Samantha Laine Perfas, "LGBTQ Book Challenges Are on the Rise. Here's Why," Harvard Gazette, June 27, 2023, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/06/lgbtq-book-challenges-are-on-the-rise-heres-why/>.

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a quilt with various colored squares (blue, red, green, yellow) and a dark, possibly black, pen or quill pen resting on a light-colored, textured surface, likely a piece of fabric or paper. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent purple rectangular box.

Acknowledgement of Other Communities

We, the My Name Matters Campaign, acknowledge that we were not able to do in depth archival research for all communities as it is not within the scope of our project. As a result, many other communities are not represented to their full extent. So, we highly recommend that clubs and organizations donate any historical or current material to the archives to keep record of them. We urge all clubs and organizations to do the same so that we can create a more accurate and comprehensive history of our communities.

We must work together to ensure that the history of all our communities is properly documented and preserved.

Unearthing Resilience: A Journey Through Disability History in Archives

Archiving plays a crucial role in preserving the narratives and experiences of diverse communities, yet many voices remain marginalized in historical records. The importance of archiving lies not only in the documentation of events but also in the celebration of identities and struggles that shape our collective history. In exploring disability history, we uncover a rich tapestry of resilience, advocacy, and social change that has often been overlooked. By highlighting examples from disability history, we can illustrate how archival work serves as a vital tool for amplifying underrepresented voices. These archives not only safeguard the stories of individuals and communities but also provide context for understanding the ongoing challenges and achievements within the disability rights movement. This journey through archival materials offers a chance to acknowledge the past, recognize its impact on the present, and inspire future generations to continue the fight for inclusivity and equity. As you will see in the following clippings, often there is not a significant focus on neurodivergence but physical disability. The following clippings can now be found in the Mercer Archives. Please mind that the term “handicapped” is dated and no longer appropriate to describe those with disabilities.

cadets who were commissioned as second lieutenants at the end of camp included Jay Wells, Sherilyn Hodges, David Sanders, and Dee Kelley. Camp officials rated cadets, based on their accomplishments in physical training, rifle marksmanship, map reading, military skills, and leadership. The high standards set by Mercer's cadets allowed for their outstanding finish at advanced camp. Even more outstanding is the fact that Mercer finished ahead of some prestigious Eastern military schools such as the Citadel and Virginia Military Institution.

Announcements

- Remember to pick up your Imagius Art Prints in the Office of Student Activities.
- There will be no Catholic Mass on campus this Sunday due to Father Cuddy's illness.
- Intracollegiate Bible Study, Wednesday, October 5, 8:00 p.m., Room 314.
- Session I of the Career Exploration Workshop will be held next Wednesday morning, 10-12, in the Student Development Office.

Handicapped have rights too

By Jacqueline Whipple

Warning is being given. To all those students who have carelessly or selfishly parked in marked handicapped parking spaces in the past, you are now being warned. All cars that are found illegally parked will be towed away at the cost of the owner. Mary Pollitzer, head coordinator of disabled student affairs informed the *Cluster* Tuesday that her office and Mercer's security system are joining in a combined effort to start cracking down on those who violate the rights of disabled students who attend Mercer.

Ms. Pollitzer, who is also a student counselor, stated Tuesday that her office promotes the independence of disabled students so that they might have a healthy college career and college experience. But how can one have independence when one has no facilities for independence? The parking spaces that are so marked for disabled students may seem a small convenience, but instead is a life line. To a disabled student a parking space that he depends on everyday to aid him in getting to his classes is a very important matter. When a non-disabled person parks in a marked disabled parking space he is deliberately infringing upon someone else's rights. Disabled students ask for very little and the least one can do is be considerate and give them what is rightly provided for their use. A parking space that is closer to a building or class may look like a luxury to some, but is an absolute must for disabled students.

The majority of Mercer's non-disabled student body feels that the steps the disabled student affairs office and the security system are now planning are well worth the effort. As one student put it, "If a person has to walk two or three miles to get to his

destination, it is better that he walks the distance rather than a handicapped person." There were those students who felt that it really did not matter whether or not they used the spaces or not because "they are hardly ever used." But they are used and considered a necessity to disabled students.

Mercer finds all of its students a valuable asset and to those of us who are more fortunate than others we

should try to remember that. Whether a student be disabled or not he deserves proper consideration. Next time you have an urge to park in a disabled parking space and you know that it is not yours by right, try and imagine the frustration of having someone take something that rightfully belongs to you. If that does not work try imagining your car being towed away. It is something to think about is it not?



Left to right: Brenda Youmans, Cynthia Baker, Karla Heath, Rita Hines, Carmen Robinson, Cynthia Lamar, Laxaivier Reddick and Marion Stenson.

AKA's start year

The Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated now has a total of eight members after initiating four members this past spring quarter: Laxaivier Reddick, Marion Stenson, Carmen Robinson, and Rita Hines.

This year the sorority plans to work diligently in assisting the Mercer and

Macon community. Naturally, you will be hearing progress reports from the dedicated groups of young ladies very soon.

The sorority would like to welcome all freshmen to the Mercer community and to welcome back all upperclassmen.

Handicap Awareness Day

TUESDAY, MAY 5, 1987

WHEELCHAIR SOCCER - 6:00 p.m./Porter Gym

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 1987

- 9:00 a.m. Max Cleland
Engineering School
- 10:00 a.m. Staff/Faculty Breakfast/Max Cleland
Engineering School
- 10:45 a.m. Performance by Bear Hands
- 11:00 a.m. Mr. Cleland's Address
Willet Science Center (Lecture Hall)
- 11:00 a.m. Displays of Visiting Agencies & Companies
Connell Student Center
- 11:45 a.m. Tour of Campus for Mr. Cleland & Guests
- 12:00 noon Lunch in Cafeteria with Student Representatives
- 1:00 p.m. Outside Activities Begin - Wheelchair
Obstacle Course, Relay Races, Stetson Parking
Lot & Wheelchair Tennis/Tennis Court
- 1:15 p.m. Wheelchair Aerobics
Connell Student Center (Co-Op)
- 1:30 p.m. Scavenger Hunt/Connell Student Center Lobby
- 2:00 p.m. Exhibition Wheelchair Basketball Game
Porter Gym
- 3:15 p.m. Blindfolded Softball
Softball Field
- 3:30 p.m. Team Softball
Softball Field
- 4:00 p.m. Scavenger Hunt
Connell Student Center Lobby
- 8:00 p.m. Stage Hands Performance
Connell Student Center (Co-Op)

¹ "Handicapped Have Rights Too" *Mercer Cluster*, page 2 (Macon, GA, September 30, 1984) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

² "Handicap Awareness Day" *Mercer Cluster*, page 6. (Macon, GA, May 1, 1987) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

Guest opinion

Universal Access Health Care: Why we need it and why we don't have it

By DAVID PARISH, MD

The following is the first of a two part guest editorial by Dr. David Parish, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine at the Mercer University School of Medicine. Dr. Parish received bachelors degrees from Ole Miss and the University of New Orleans. He has completed advanced graduate work at Tulane and his M.D. comes from the LSU School of Medicine. This piece was originally published in the Blueprint for Social Justice, which comes from Loyola University of New Orleans. Dr. Parish is also a member of the Writing Committee for Physicians for a National Health Program, which published "A National Health Program for the United States: A Physicians' Proposal" in the January 12th edition of The New England Journal of Medicine.



Dr. Parish

What is wrong with American health care? The richest country in the world has almost 40 million people with no health care coverage, or one in six persons. Even those who are insured frequently have inadequate coverage. The elderly, despite Medicare, now pay a larger percentage of their income directly (due to non-covered items and deductibles) than they did before Medicare. Over 20 million Americans receive Medicaid; however, Medicaid is run by states which may choose which services to cover and how much to pay for each service. In many states only 20% of the poor are covered by Medicaid.

Added to these numbers are the people with inadequate insurance. Twenty percent of a \$10-15,000 hospital bill is a heavy blow to a worker with a \$12,000 income. Over one-third of Americans are uninsured or underinsured. There is clear evidence that many people delay seeking care due to the costs they must pay directly.

The United States pays a larger percentage of our Gross National Product for health care than does any other country. However, our life expectancy, infant mortality and other health indicators rank well behind other countries which spend significantly less for health care. This is due to extremely bad health among the poor; our well insured population has a health status equivalent to that of people in other industrialized countries. Our abnormally high expenditures are attributable to bloated administrative costs and lack of planning. As we will demonstrate, the cost of care for the poor is also higher because of a lack of preventive care.

How has this evolved? Why do we allow so many people to suffer ill health? Why do other countries do so much bet-

ter in assuring health to their population?

Access to health care is a component of a society's basic social contract. Several key issues are involved in the type of system which evolves in a country. The basic question is whether decision makers deem health care worth the human and physical costs needed to provide services. The clear benefits of public health services such as water purification, vaccination, and maternal and child health care have resulted in provision of such services in most countries. Support for public health funding is strengthened by the fact that all persons in society benefit from universal access to hygiene and vaccinations. Curative and other preventive services show a much wider range of availability, reflecting different analyses of their benefits to society.

Historical Perspective On Health Care

Societies have organized hospital care for the poor for centuries. Hospitals began as facilities for treating the indigent. Affluent people received care at home. The special role of hospitals was to provide housing for people too ill to work and too poor to have houses when not working. In the US these began in port cities for the needs of the merchant marines. Hospitals have become institutions for provision of specialized medical care only since the late 19th century.

Systems for paying for medical care began with guild insurance in the middle ages. In the 1800's insurance plans for workers were expanded in industrialized countries partly as disability coverage for wages lost while ill. Industrialized societies (other than the United States and South Africa) have gradually evolved a system which guarantees access to ambulatory and hospital services. Methods of payments to doctors and hospitals vary significantly among these countries but universal access is a constant. Universal access to health care has been a major reform instituted in socialist countries.

Why has the evolution of the health care system in the United States failed to produce universal access? The evolution of payment for health care in the US has not formed a national strategy. Debate over a national health insurance program dates back to 1915. Strong movements at this time and subsequently in the late 1940's and 1960's were resolved in favor of the pluralistic, market-based model. In the 1940's this controversy fostered massive funding for expansion of hospitals in small cities and towns under the Hill-Burnt On Act. Provisions were made requiring unfunded care for indigents in this act but these were ignored for years. Court decisions have forced hospitals to provide uncompensated care through this program but the amount and kinds of services are limited.

In the 1960's compromises resulted in the Medicare and

Medicaid programs. These programs funded by the New Deal's welfare programs, leaving the employer and private purchase insurance plans to dominate the market. Health care planning received endorsement and funds in the 1960's, but the programs have had too little power to bring rational development.

The Present Reality

Indigent care in the US has traditionally been viewed as a state or local responsibility. Even Medicaid programs, which are funded primarily through Federal sources, are designed and administered on a state level. No two states fund indigent care the same. Financing of indigent care is frequently placed on the county governments; many states collect no data on the total amount spent on care.

In a 1985 review of indigent care, the Intergovernmental Health Policy Project (IHPP) found that sixteen states have no statewide program for indigent care. In Georgia, for example, counties are required by law to provide care for the indigent, but the state allows each county to define indigency and provides no monitoring or punishment for refusal to pay for services. Those counties which do pay for care,

Continued on page 6



³ David Parish, "Universal Access Health Care: Why We Need it and Why We Don't Have it" *Mercer Cluster*, page 6. (Macon, GA, February, 27 1989) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

Mid-State Challenge Project

By Heather Kimble

The problems associated with being handicapped are and always have been of major concern to society. The term handicapped refers to both mental and physical disabilities. There are several programs in Georgia that are designed to improve the lives of handicapped people. One such program is the Mid-State Challenge Project which is stationed at the Mercer Center for Health Care. Dr. Thomas Glendon and Dr. Mary Ann Drake from the Mercer Psychology Department are the leading forces behind

this new project. Mid-State Challenge is targeted at children between the ages of 0 and 5 who are in danger of growing up with developmental disabilities. Children are referred to the Mid-State Challenge staff by pediatricians, nurseries or parents. Every Tuesday, the clinic is open for screening. This screening process is necessary to determine exactly which specialists are needed for each child's case. On Wednesday, the clinic is open for the actual treatment.

The Mid-State Challenge

Program began in 1985. Since its beginning, over 200 children have been treated. The treatment involves evaluating the child's developmental problems and then referring the child to various services that will improve the child's condition. Such services as speech therapy, surgery, physical and occupational therapy, and medical care are often recommended. Sometimes, these recommendations pose a problem because these services are often inadequate or simply not

Continued on page 2

Developmental Disabilities Project Sponsors Workshops

The Mid-State Developmental Disabilities Project will hold five week-long workshops for parents, caseworkers and other allied professionals at Mercer University's Macon campus starting in June.

The workshops and the dates they will run include:
June 10-13 "Needs, Problems, and Prospects: A Challenge For Us All"

June 16-20 "The Care and Handling of Children with Complex Needs at Home and in the Preschool or Day Care Service"

June 23-27 "Task-Analysis Training: How to Design and Use Powerful Teaching Strategies to Train Children or Adults with Complex Problems"

June 30-July 3 (Two short sessions of two days each) "Augmentative Communication Systems for the Speech Impaired Child" and "The Feeding Process: Developing Abilities in Feeding the Disabled"

Pre-registration for the workshops before June 8 will guarantee a place, and parents who wish to participate in the workshops with their children must pre-register. Parents or guardians who bring their children to the workshop for specific training will not be charged for tuition.

Further information about fees, classroom locations, and credits for the workshops is available through Mercer's TDivision of Community Education (912)744-2980.

Handicap Awareness Day Update!

There are many people on this campus who really don't know what Exceptional Student Services is all about. Well, as a preview to Handicap Awareness Day, which is May 6th, this report is meant to enlighten your awareness about Exceptional Student Services and the students who are served by this division of Student Life.

Thirty-four students are served through the Exceptional Student Services office. The majority of the students have learning disabilities, however, a number of them have other problems such as a visual impairment, seizure disorders, and spina Bifida. Mercer is one of the few private colleges that accepts learning disabled students. Mercer also has a full-time staff person, Linda Conrads, who works with these students to ensure that their college experience is as normal as any other student's.

The learning disabled students are of particular concern because they tend to be the ones who are stigmatized the most. A learning disability is a permanent disorder which affects the manner in which a person with normal or above average intelligence take in,

retain, and express information. Information processing is fuzzy, like a scrambled television picture. Deficits in learning usually occur in one of the following areas: reading comprehension, spelling, written expression, math computation, and problem solving. They also may have problems with time management and social skills.

This problem is very frustrating for learning disabled students because the disability is often inconsistent. One day it may present a problem and the next day it might not. It may cause problems throughout grade school, seem to disappear in high school, and resurface in college. It could also manifest itself in one area (i.e., math) or cover a number of areas.

However, learning disabled students can be helped if their professors are willing to help these students discover alternative ways of studying. The professors could also help by finding different ways of testing these students without, of course, changing the standards. With encouragement and patience, the learning disabled students have a better chance of making it at Mercer.

Rosiland Guidry



President Kirby Godsey declares April 6 Handicap Awareness Day as Linda Conrads looks on.

Wheelchair basketball and obstacle course highlight Handicap Awareness Day

"Speak out, step up, and make a difference; learn to look not with pity but with friendship on the handicapped."

That statement, made by Alana Shepherd of the Shepherd Spinal Center in Atlanta, emphasized a main thrust of the third annual Handicap Awareness Day on Wednesday.

Events of the day included wheelchair basketball and obstacle course, blindfold softball, and performances by the Unity Choir of the organization of Black Students

and Bear Hands. Students and staff alike wore buttons emphasizing this year's HAD theme, "Disability does not equal inability."

Shepherd, speaking at a morning program, stated the necessity of making a commitment to handicap awareness, and said all could "speak up" in the community on issues such as restaurant and parking facilities for the handicapped.

Activities of the day were designed to let the non-handicapped experience what it is like to be wheelchair bound, blind, or other-

wise handicapped.

"We are stressing the fact that the 'dis' in disability is just a prefix to ability, and we planned the day's activities for fun and enjoyment which at the same time increases general awareness of what it is like to live with a handicap," said Linda Conrads, coordinator of exceptional student services.

Last week President Kirby Godsey signed a proclamation designating April 6 as Handicap Awareness Day.

⁴ "Middle State Challenge Project" *Mercer Cluster*, page 1. (Macon, GA, February, 20 1987) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

⁵ Handicap Awareness Day Update!" *Mercer Cluster*, page 5. (Macon, GA, April, 24 1987) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

⁶ "Developmental Disabilities Project Sponsors Workshop." *Mercer Cluster*, page 6. (Macon, GA, April, 25 1986) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

⁷ "Wheelchair Basketball and Obstacle Course Highlight Handicap Awareness Day" *Mercer Cluster*, page 1. (Macon, GA, April, 7 1988) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

Handicap Awareness Day

The Mercer University community will observe its 3rd Annual Handicap Awareness Day on April 5 & 6, 1988. The day has been set aside to let the community know that a *disability is NOT an inability*. Come out and share the fun with us.

- ★ Wheelchair Obstacle Course ★ OBS Choir ★ Wheelchair Basketball
- ★ Bear Hands ★ Wheelchair Soccer ★ Guest Speakers
- ★ Hot Dogs ★ Cokes ★ Cotton Candy ★ And much, much more....!

⁸ Handicap Awareness Day." *Mercer Cluster*, page 10. (Macon, GA, March 4, 1988) Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Jack Tarver Library, Macon, GA.

Special Services Program

Handicapped Find Help at Mercer

A total of 67 physically handicapped students are served by the Special Services Rehabilitation Program at Mercer University. It is geared toward encouraging their independence in a world in which they will compete with the non-handicapped.

"We never do anything for our students that they can do for themselves," said Richard E. Hyer, who coordinates the program.

Funded through a grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the program provides practical assistance to students suffering from many types of physical handicaps. The rehabilitation program, established three years ago, has been recognized as a model for similar programs throughout the country. Bobby Jones is coordinator of student assistance.

THE SERVICES are as varied as the needs of students whose handicaps range from congenital defects and amputated limbs to those with visual and hearing impairments and to others who are psychologically disabled. Each case is considered separately and efforts made to meet individual needs.

Bill Morris, a junior from Macon, an amputee who is served by the program, said, "The person-to-person relationship has meant a great deal to me on campus. Knowing that someone cares is important."

Morris, who lost an arm in an automobile accident while serving in the U.S. Navy, is responsible for assisting two physically handicapped students in getting around campus. "Coordinating my schedule with that of two other persons has given me a sense of responsibility and self-satisfaction." In addition, he does freelance photography.

A DOUBLE service is performed in the student assistance phase of the program. Students such as Morris, already a part of the project, and others who need jobs are referred from the financial aid office at Mercer. After interviews, they are assigned to

assist physically handicapped students.

"It's a trial and error system," said Hyer, "and we try to match personalities because the relationship is very close." The student workers are that handicapped students get help in their academic subjects as well as performing other duties.

The services provided by the rehabilitation program may be as simple as getting an upstairs class transferred to a downstairs classroom in order that a boy in a wheel chair may attend. Or for a need with a 90 per cent hearing loss the service may take the form of finding a fellow student who will supplement her class notes.

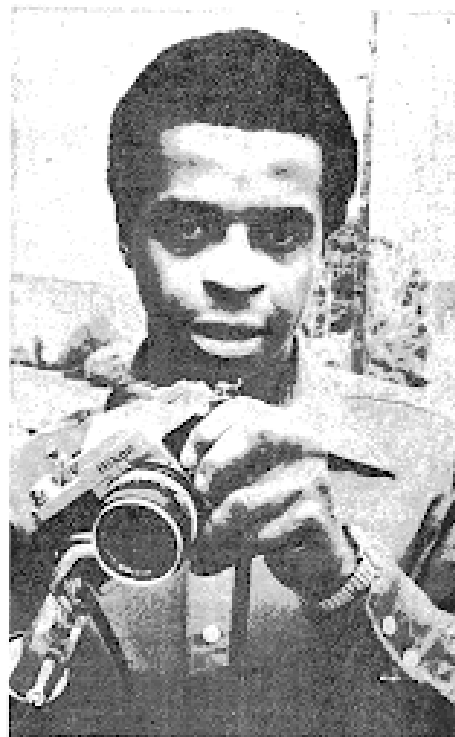
PENNY MOSS, of Atlanta, a visually handicapped freshman, has found the program helpful in obtaining recorded textbooks. Some books are not available in recordings, however, and Penny has a full time reader, Kathy Bowen, a senior psychology major.

"The discipline of having to concentrate on what is being read to me has helped me personally," Penny said. Kathy sometimes records materials for Penny when their schedules conflict. Penny plans to seek the help of a tutor in English during spring quarter.

Counseling is an important phase of the rehabilitation services. Adjustment problems at college, although not necessarily greater than for other students, sometimes seem greater or take different forms because many times a boy or girl has been over-protected both at home and at school. A clinical psychologist serves as a consultant for the program.

"WE ASK that professors not make any concessions in courses for handicapped students," Hyer said. "Each student must learn that adjustments will not be made because of his disability—even though, as in the case of a visually handicapped student, necessary reading time may be three times longer than for a sighted student."

Hyer continued, "The freshman who comes from a regulated situation in which ex-



Junior Bill Morris Ready With Camera
"Knowing That Someone Cares Is Important"

ercises were made for him usually needs some counseling and guidance in adjusting to the freedom of the college campus." Such problems as social acceptance for the students and prejudice against them also are dealt with in counseling, Hyer said.

Tutorial services are available for physically handicapped students at Mercer. Hyer, who is also a visiting instructor in Mercer's education department, serves as a liaison between the students and faculty members. The dropout rate for physically handicapped students is low at Mercer and their grades are above average.

ASSISTANCE is also available for students temporarily disabled from injuries such as fractures. The rehabilitation

program provides golf carts to enable these students to travel on campus.

Guidance counselors in the Southeastern United States receive information about Mercer's rehabilitation program, and the university's admissions officers interpret the service in their visits to high schools. Hyer serves as a liaison with the State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation in Georgia and other states in an effort to reach qualifying students.

Hyer, a 1966 graduate of Mercer, received the M.A. degree from the University of Michigan and after two years as a counselor at Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon came to Mercer to coordinate the rehabilitation program.

MERCER UNIVERSITY

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⁹ "Handicapped Find Help at Mercer". April 2, 1973, *Macon Telegraph*, Macon, Ga, [Subject Folder]: "ADA" Archives and Digital Initiatives, Mercer University Library, Macon, GA.

Handicapped

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Hyer continued, "The freshman who comes from a regimented situation in which decisions were made for him usually needs some counseling and guidance in adjusting to the freedom of the college campus." Such problems as social acceptance for the students and prejudice against them also are dealt with in counseling, Hyer said.

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Judy Herndon, a blind freshman from Macon, who is served by the Special Services Rehabilitation Program at Mercer, and Buffy, her golden retriever "leader dog", pause for a chat between classes with another student, Lorraine Arango. Judy spent a month last summer in Rochester, Mich., where she received training from "Leader Dogs for the Blind" and met Buffy who is the only canine permitted in a Mercer classroom.

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Following graduation from Mercer, Hyer received the M.A. degree from the University of Michigan and after two years as a counsellor at Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon returned to Mercer to coordinate the rehabilitation program.



Bill Morris, a senior in the rehabilitation program, is a freelance photographer.

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In our efforts to represent transwomen of color, we would like to acknowledge Navigating Omitted Minds Overtime (NOMO), an organization that was founded by Zaria Newbill in 2017. This organization supports LGBTQ+ people, empowers transwomen of color, and educates the community to reduce the stigma associated with HIV. To learn more about the story of Zaria Newbill and how she founded NOMO, we conducted an interview and with an excerpt edited for clarity below. You can visit the NOMO website at nomoorganization.org

Navigating Omitted Minds Overtime (NOMO)

Zaria Newbill; Transwoman (she/her); Heterosexual
Founder & Executive Director of Navigating Omitted Minds Overtime

Bekehm: Can you tell me a little bit about your life? This can be like your upbringing, your journey as recent, or as far along, as you want.

“Sure. Absolutely. So I’m a Taurus baby born April 22, 1989, in Pulaski County, Georgia. Hawkinsville, Georgia of all places. Very small little town. My upbringing there was absolutely amazing. Nothing but love. It’s where I also discovered that my gender identity was different from my actual physical appearance. And so back in—back then, you know, you didn’t know what to call it. I just knew I was different. And so, you know, growing up with my mom and my sisters and my grandmother and my aunt, and my father, you know, we never really saw any representation of what transgender identities or any form of gender identities look like except for male, female. And so just growing up there around family, then we moved to Macon in 1997. When we moved to Macon in 1997, ooh-wee, we lived on Second Street first. And, I attended Burke Elementary School with Dr. Hatchett, who was still the principal then. Also, I’m, you know, one of the old school people now. And so from there, I would also attended Rosa Taylor Elementary School. I remember my first teacher, Ms. Beth Johnson. She was my fourth grade teacher. She poured so much love into me, because she saw me. She was one of the people that really saw me for who I was, and didn’t try to force anything on me. And she’s no longer here, but she definitely was a intricate part into my transition, seeing me for who I was. And then, went to Progressive Christian Academy. The late Dr. Betty J. Tolbert was the founder and principal there until—until she retired, which is a private Christian school.

And so, my parents, got heavily deep in the church, ‘97, ‘98, ‘99. Coming from Hawkinsville, church was only on first and third and maybe fifth Sunday, if it wasn’t fifth Sunday. And so we really didn’t know church until we moved to Macon. And, you know, they engulfed us in that space. And, being in that space and trying to understand not only my gender identity, but my sexual orientation too at the same time was very, very trying because of the simple fact that I knew I was different. And I’m going to a space pretty much every single day telling me that this higher being called God doesn’t like me, doesn’t love me, doesn’t wanna deal with me. And so, just going through that process and really trying to suppress that, really was very, very difficult, for me. My sisters, who are my backbone, have always been supportive. I’m

the oldest sister. So I have a middle sister, and then I have a baby sister. And so even though we were all young, we you know how siblings just have that unspoken bond, and that's what that was between all of us. Because at the time, just identifying as gay was just easier to maneuver and navigate. But when I discovered in high school after I graduated Progressive Christian Academy, what I discovered in high school that there were different people that I could officially see myself in them and then start doing research because, we didn't have, like, you know, computers and things like that in Hawkinsville because it's, you know, very country. And, even Internet back then was really slow because we had AOL dial up. And so goes to show how—you know—how far along we've come along. Thank God for Google. And so—and so now moving forward, I'm in high school now. This was a point in time for me where I really shifted my thinking because I was in a private Christian school going to church pretty much seven days a week because I was in the choir, I was on the praise team, I was a youth intercessor. I was all of these things engulfed in church and, just—it just didn't sit right with me about what the theology teaching that I was getting. And it wasn't making sense because I heard 'oh, you should develop your own relationship with God.' So, when I did, God told me that I was straight. God told me that I was okay. Nothing was wrong with me. I made you. Like, can I cuss?"

Bekehm: Yes.

"Okay. Fuck what everyone else has to say. You know, just be yourself, and I'll take you and I'll carry you the rest of the way. I said, okay. And so at thirteen, when I started, I went to William S. Hutchings. At the time, it was called William S. Hutchings Career Center, and it changed its name to William S. Hutchings High School by the time I graduated in 2007. And so, at William S. Hutchings High School, we formulated a program that was LGBTQ centered, because there were so many of us and there was no safe space for us or anything like that. So we went to our principal, and we was like, yo, listen Ms. Perkins. Laura Perkins, I love her. We went to her and she was like, hey—We went to her. We was like listen, there's no safe space, there's no club for us, and you gotta end—about half—over half of your student body here identifies as LGBTQ. And so she was like, well, you all draw something up, present it to me, and then we'll move forward from there. And so we took it to her, and she was, like, approved. Then we had like sixty people [at] our first meeting that we had. And so I have always been this advocate for people. I've always spoken up for people. I was in every club in high school. FBLA [Future Business Leaders of America], Beta Club, anchor club. I was an ambassador. I was in fitness club. You name it, I was in it. Because I've always had this energy about just really wanting to make an impact in people's lives. And so, during that time of high school was very trying. I'm not gonna lie because, you know, I was what they consider a late bloomer. So, like, my hormone levels and all that good jazz didn't really start showing up until my eleventh and twelfth grade year.

Now while I had a boyfriend in high school, I really couldn't tell my parents because they were like, you know, don't bring that in our house. Okay. Cool. Right? You can't bring it in your house. But, honestly, I had to tell them. I was like, I like boys. And they were like, okay, we know you're gay, so we can handle

that. Because my mom had gay friends, my dad had gay friends, but, you know, for them, it did take them a while because, you know, like I've always said, until something hits your home, you doesn't—you don't understand how it feels internally in the home and the energy in the home until you really have that conversation. And so it wasn't until I was seventeen years old, I had tried to commit suicide. Oh, excuse me. Let me back up. When I was fifteen, I tried to commit suicide by cutting because I became a cutter because I kept suppressing my real true gender identity, which was a woman. And, at seventeen again, I went out to Synergy, the new GBA now. It was the only safe space and the only gay club that we had in Macon at the time. And we went there. I went there this one night. My best friend, she did my makeup for me. I never forget I had this long jet black wig and this turquoise—the leopard dress, and I had on some bronze heels. You couldn't tell me nothing because that was cute. Okay? And so that was the first time I felt liberated in my mind, and I was like, this is the person that I've always seen. And so moving forward, I would get dressed at my best friend's house because I couldn't do it at home. And so then after that, after I would leave the club, I would go back to my best friend's house, change, and then I would go home.

And my eighteenth—my senior year in high school, we went to my senior prom, and, my dad found all of my love letters to my boyfriend, our pictures, my dresses, my heels, everything, and threw it all away. And that broke me. That broke me. And, one of my church members at the time was actually downtown the same night—I decided to go out this particular night—went back and told everybody in the church that they saw me in a wig and a dress being a woman. And it got back to my parents, and this is where life really took a real hard turn for me. And so I ended up packing my things. I didn't get kicked out. I packed my shit, and I left. And I went to stay with, then, my sister's old manager at McDonald's, and I started working at Payless that was over Presidential Parkway. And so I started working over there and my aunt, my mom's sister who was a lesbian, her and her girlfriend came up and they got me, because I had been gone for about two months, and I wasn't answering nobody's phone call.

And so, they came and got me. They was like, you're bringing your ass home. I was like, I don't want it to go back over there because me and mom already got into a fight, and me and daddy, we're not seeing eye to eye. The only love I really get is from my sister. So I really don't wanna be in a space where I'm not being confirmed. So she was like, I'm gonna go talk to them. So they talked alright. My auntie was about to knock my dad inside his head. And so—and so fast forward, moved back home, was there for maybe about a week, and then I moved in with my best friend. And it was her teaching me and showing me about life and showing me how to grow and blossom into a strong independent woman where you don't take no shit from nobody. And my best friend taught me that. And once I started dating and all that good jazz, I ended up moving out. And I did move back home for a while. That was, I cannot remember, but there was something that was going on with my mom. It was my mom's health I think was declining. And I end up moving back home. That helped them take care of the bills and all of that good jazz. And then from there, I left home, I moved out, got my own place, and, you know, just had been in several—less—I should guess—I'm just gonna be transparent if we could be honest. I had several different sexual

encounters with different men in Macon –until I had my first boyfriend–and we lived in Tara Apartments right over there off of Log Cabin. It’s amazing I can remember all these things. And so we was together for three years, and we ended up breaking up because I couldn’t take the fact that he was not ready to let the drug life go.

And I was like, I can’t continue to be in this, because he was going back and forth to jail. I’m working, catching the buses because I didn’t have a car at the time, because the car that I did have broke down. And I moved back home because my sister had gotten married, and she moved out.

[Redacted]

And so moving forward now, I moved to Atlanta, started dating my ex-husband. And, baby, let me tell you, we was together for almost ten years, married for three. He was a pastor, so I dated a pastor of all things . . . of all things. And so when we started talking back in 2010, I told him–I was like, ‘Listen, I’m gonna transition. I just don’t know–I just don’t know when.’ I said, ‘Because the person you see in front of you is a facade. It’s fake.’ I said, ‘So, who you see now was not what was gonna be in a few years.’ And he was like okay, cool. And so, you know, just moving forward in life. And so I started my HRT, which is hormone replacement therapy, and it became a real issue, because in 2016 is when I started my transition. And he was like–he became not sexually attracted to me anymore, because I had developed breasts and, you know, started thickening out. And, you know, guys was looking and trying to ‘Yo, shawty, I’m tryna holla at cha.’

‘No boo boo, I’m married.’

‘Oh!’

‘I’m good, but thank you.’

And it was–it was just really interesting. And from that–during that time, while I was trying to navigate spaces of remembering those things that my best friend taught me about being a woman and being independent and being strong, that’s when I started the NOMO organization back in 2017. March 27, 2017. Because before I was going to support groups and all of these things and hearing the stories of these women saying that they’ve been homeless and they’ve had to do sex work and they, you know, weren’t able to finish and graduate high school. And, you know, they’re in abusive relationships and, you know, they don’t feel safe at all. And coming to these support groups, getting a twenty-five dollar gift card and a warm meal was probably gonna be all the money or the only meal that they got for that particular day.

And I was sitting there in my privilege. Like I graduated college and, you know, I didn’t get kicked out. I ran away. I have a husband. I’m just sitting there in my privilege, like, bitch, you need to do something because you have something that these women do not have–have probably have never had access to. So I started NOMO in 2017, and NOMO actually started in the church as a ministry. And it

started as a back to school program in the ministry, and so what we did was Change For Change. And so every Sunday for a whole year, we would just ask our commissioner. It's just, 'Hey, bring your loose change that you collect throughout the week, and we'll buy school supplies when it's time for school.' So we did it—did it for one year, and we raised, like, five thousand dollars in just change for a year. And we were able to give away a hundred book bags full of school supplies. Walmart, Target donated so much to us, and they were, like, really excited for what we were doing because it was in a really Black urban neighborhood where Title I schools. So, you know, the parents didn't have a lot. They're working two or three jobs trying to make ends meet like a lot of us are doing now. And, it was a—it was a really—it was a beautiful, beautiful blessing to be able to do that.

And, me and my ex-husband, we started having issues in our marriage. And then this is where we just kinda started separating, and I started pulling back. And I was like, you know what? I am going to take NOMO, and I'm going to utilize it to help trans women, because I'm at a point now where I saw the writings on the wall with my marriage, and it was gonna be over soon. Because he started cheating on me because, again, he wasn't sexually attracted to me anymore because I started transitioning. And, you know, while I caught him in his infidelity, I was like, if I go out here and do it, it's gonna hurt you. So he kept threatening divorce. And while he kept threatening, I was like, you know, all these threats, I'm just gonna go do it. So I went and filed myself. I was like, you're not gonna keep, you know, stringing me along.

And so [I] went and filed for divorce, [he] told the judge straight up, I don't wanna divorce her because her sex is too good. Straight up told the judge. And it—and it's so funny because, like, all the men in the courtroom just like you know. They just did that look like, what? And it was so—y'all, I kid y'all not. It was so hilarious. And the judge was like, is he telling the truth? And I was like, I mean . . . I was like, I think I do an amazing job in the bedroom, but we're not here about that. I'm trying to get away from his ass. That's what I'm trying to do. So, after two years, we finalized the divorce. And, just a scary part. And I love that you all are having this conversation because it speaks to the realness and the authenticity of what black trans women are going through now. He actually kept threatening me because I still had some items at the place where we were cohabitating. And he, threatened that he was going to shoot me. And sure enough, sent it in a text message. I talked to my attorney. He was like, you need to get the police to escort you there and also to escort you off the premises. Okay, cool. So I get there. He was live on Facebook and had the gun cocked and ready because he thought I was gonna open the door, and lo and behold, it was DeKalb County Sheriff at the door. He thought it was me. And the sheriff was like, what are you doing? And he went back to the table in the dining room and sat down and started just typing and just on Facebook just ranting and raving. I'm all kind of bitches and hoes, and I'm a, you know, home wrecker and all of these things. All because I decided to live my life authentically. And that's a part of the sacrifice that I made for myself because I didn't want to keep living in this—in this abuse of emotional abuse and psychological abuse and mental abuse and verbal abuse because it got ugly while I was living with him. It got really, really ugly. And I tell anybody, you know, you can ask anybody that I was around,

because my best friend lived with us at the time, and she saw the stuff. She thought I was over exaggerating when I was saying how he was acting before she moved in with us because she was living in Pensacola, Florida at the time. And she was moving back up here because she was getting married to her ex-husband. And she thought I was over exaggerating. And when she saw for herself in person, she was like, wow, I'm sorry, she said, because I really thought, like, I didn't know it was—it was this serious. And so we ended up divorced. I, of course, had to file for bankruptcy, and I became homeless for three months. And, my pride would not allow me to move back home as I lived in my car for three months. I slept and ate what I could had—I still had a job—decent paying job. But when you're in a bankruptcy, apartments won't rent to you."

Bekehm: Yeah.

"And . . . I managed to sleep on the couch of a good friend, Chris and his partner. And they let me stay there as long as I needed to. And I mean, to this day, it's like I'm indebted to them because I was—at the time, I was program manager for group homes. And my boss was like, you know, 'I was sharing with her what was gonna—' she was like, 'Just go to the group home and take a shower. Ain't nobody gotta know.' They're the day program during the day anyway, so just go do what you gotta do. And she understood what I was going through. She's very sympathetic and understanding. And so, after that, I found a place, and I went in. I said, I wanna speak to the manager. I don't wanna talk to one of the associates that's there. I need to talk to the manager directly. And so, five minutes away from my job, I found this apartment complex, and I spoke to the manager, explained to her my situation, and she was like, I have a studio apartment that's vacant. She said, at the time, it was nine sixty nine. And she said do you want it? I said yes. How much do I pay to—I will pay you whatever. We had just gotten paid, and she was like, what can you give me? She said because I don't wanna take all your money because you gotta get your lights put on. You gotta get that. I said, I don't give a flying fish. You tell me what I need to pay so I can get in here, and that's what I pay. She said if you could give me first month and we'll just waive your deposit. I said okay. So I went and got my money order. I had to do a money order for the application fee, admin fee, all of that good jazz, and did that.

And so I had the keys, everything same day. And so I was able to get moved in. And for the first time, I was back on my own again, but I was on my own as a woman. And that's when this level of liberation and independence just surged through my body. And I was like, bitch, you are about to take this world by storm. And I was like, there is nothing that's going to stop you. The only person that's going to stop you is you. I said, period. Let's go. So I started researching again. I started reaching out to people because I was living up here in Atlanta at the time. And I was like, what is it that NOMO needs to do in Macon? I said, what wasn't there for you when you needed services? What wasn't there for you when you needed support? And so I just started mapping out all of these things and calling this person, calling that person. I'm like hey, I'm getting ready to do this. Do you wanna be a part? I'm having this support group.

We're gonna have food. You know, we're gonna talk about, you know, things that's, you know, going on in the community. What can we do to help and be an intricate part? And, you know, our first support group, we had seven people show up, and it was over at Compass Cares, which is, I think, the HOPE Center now over there on Emery Highway. We had it over there. That was our little hub over there. And so we were there every Saturday, like clockwork, from twelve to two. We were having our support groups, and we would have our conversations. And then it just started spreading like wildfire.

And so, we got involved with the Catholic Church. One of their parishioners—they came and met the leader. He was telling me about a book that he wrote, and it was about inclusivity in the church and how it's never really been discussed in the church and what this affirming, ministries and things like that look like. And because they had never seen or experienced a transgender person, whether it was a trans man or a trans woman. They were just like, this is fascinating to us because we've never seen transgender people. Even though we've always been here, we just never been visible. And so I've always took it upon myself to always speak out and be visible and be a representative or be the real representation of what—and I'm a keep it real—of what transgender living is like. Because some people believe that being trans is just a phase or that it's just, you know—or just a trend. And I have to tell people no, baby. This is real life. When I walk outside of my door, I'm putting my life on the line just by stepping outside of my door because I don't know who doesn't like me. I don't know who has a issue with, you know, with the community. I just don't know. So every single day, I'm putting my life on the line. And so ever since 2017, it has taken off.

And y'all, when I tell you, I have been in places and been in spaces where I have just been so eternally grateful because I never thought that I would be where I am today because, you know, NOMO just started off as a ministry in church that evolved into another community that was also in need. And so I saw that need, and I was taking my own money, and I was funding everything. Whether, you know, people needed gas cards or food or, you know, oh, you need a outfit, you know, for work. You know? Let's go—let's go to the Goodwill. Let's try to buy you something. You know? There was a point in time when we did—we did a 'transgiving,' and we fed over a hundred people. And it was—it was a success. We were trying to reserve some plates because we also wanted to go to Central City Park because we know there were homeless people there in the area. And so while we were there—and this is such a beautiful story—while we were there, we were handing out the plates that we had on reserve. We met another man who was a barber from Warner Robins. He was just passing out pizza. And he was like hey, what y'all doing? I was like, oh, well, you know, this is for our transgiving, and I was introducing myself. And he was like, oh, you know, we should exchange contact information. Sure! Absolutely! We exchange contact information.

And around the wintertime, it became really, really cold December, January, around that time. And so he reached out to me. He said hey, do you all have funding, to kinda put people up in hotels? And I was like, I don't. I said, but if you know someone that do—this around the time DoorDash really became popular— I said we'll DoorDash them a meal three times a day. And so we DoorDash meals to, I wanna

say, fifteen people three times a day for about two weeks. And those people never knew where the food came from. They were just grateful. So I've always been this person where I don't want people to know what, you know, what we did and where it came from. My thing is making sure that you as a human, that you don't deal with food insecurity because I know how that felt. So if that means sending you Waffle House in the morning, maybe Chick-fil-A or something, you know, for lunch and—which one? Because we developed a relationship with—who does the steak—Outback. And so we developed our relationship with Outback, and Outback was discounting our meals for us with those people. And so we were really doing a lot of work in the background that a lot of people didn't see in the forefront of what we were doing.

And so, moving forward, I started having conversations with ministries about gender identity, gender diversity. What does that look like? What was the importance of pronouns in different spaces. How people show up, because we're gonna show up differently. And it took off from there. And, 2019, I was awarded an award for being the most outs—I was on the most panels during that year, and they gave me an award because I was everywhere in 2019. If there was a CBO that was having a panel discussion, they were calling me, because I had started doing, like, these lives on Facebook. Just having simple conversations about, you know, the church and ministry and how the church, you know—how I felt being in the church. And I wanted to get other people's opinions about how they felt while they were in the church, while they were discovering or navigating or in—or in a sense of self discovery of who they were. And so that's how it started, and then it just picked up from there. And I can't even name the things that I've done because it's been so much, but it's been a blessing, I will say, because now I am an instructor for different organizations where I go and I teach about what does it look like to have transgender and nonbinary and gender non-conforming individuals in the workplace. I'm also a mental health first aid instructor where I teach about being able to identify crisis and mental health triggers and things when it comes down to people in our community. I'm a certified peer support specialist where I partner with Unspoken Treasure Society out of Florida where we've just graduated our eighth class from that program, and our ninth class will start in August. And it is nationwide because at first it was just, you know, in Atlanta, but now we've expanded because people got wind of what we were doing. And then I started pulling women in from my organization and from this organization and so we're nationwide now. I also started the Melanated Women's Empowerment Program, which is one of my amazing programs that I'm really proud of because it's for BIPOC cis and trans women. And so we have conversations around HIV, mental wellness, and spiritual wellness, because in 2020 they—Gilead and Vy—produced the receipts that women made up of over fifty percent of the new diagnoses of HIV. And so that became a real issue. And so, we were able to get funded through Black Religious Roundtable, ITC, and Gilead Sciences to be able to put together and formulate a program, which we did. It just finished. And so we're looking to start a second cohort for that this year in August, but I'm definitely gonna be looking for more BIPOC cis and trans women to be a part of this conversation because it's something that's needed because it's not something that's always been there.

It's amazing now—that the awards are coming now after all of the years of work. You know, I tell people it takes time to get acknowledgement for the work that you've done. I was like, you know, for some people—some people died, and then they were acknowledged for their work. I said, so to be able to receive my flowers now is absolutely amazing. But none of the things that I've done with NOMO—going to different states and having conversations with different people from religious perspectives and then sitting down with people in Tennessee and Florida and Mississippi, Saint Louis, D.C., all these places, and just having conversations about what does it look like for a little country girl, out of Pulaski County, Georgia, starting something now that has evolved into this amazing organization where people are like we wanna see what you're doing. We wanna know what you're doing. We wanna pour into what you are doing because for the longest time, I funded everything. So the fact that now people are now wanting to pour financial resources in, you know, behind us is absolutely amazing and mind blowing to me because, like I tell people, I have a job. I have a nine to five. So anything that we get at the NOMO organization goes back to community. We don't want anything. And now when the—and I think this was very pivotal for me too—when the non-discrimination ordinance—and I think it was in 2019, 2018, 2019—when the non-discrimination ordinance came up, Demarcus Beckham reached out to me and was like hey, you're the only trans representation that we have in the area. I was like, yeah. I was like, so, but what do you—what do you mean? I said, because in my research and what I've done and what—not in my research—but what I've heard, a lot of times when people ask for Black trans voices, Black trans women voices, they're getting this, but we don't get anything behind it.

And so my thing has always been what's the benefit for this? I said, because if it's not going to help further the agenda of what NOMO is doing, then you can just pull me out. He was like no, no, we just want you to come and speak. And then Scott Mitchell reached out to me and was like hey, you know, this is what's going on, and we really would love your voice. I said, okay. So, I was living in Atlanta, and I came down, and I spoke to, then, Mayor Rickard and spoke to the commissioners about my experience because they turned the whole entire bill from being discriminatory to the bathroom situation. I'm like, sweetheart, I have gone into the women's bathroom for years, and women have never had a issue. And there still isn't any documented instances where trans women have gone into the bathroom to attack children or women. Now there have been men that have tried to utilize being a trans woman and going to the bathroom, and not a trans woman, and go in there and do harm. I was like, that's not what that is. And so we fight so many different battles when it comes to our identities because they weaponize it, they politicize it, they fetishize it, they sexualize it. All of these things, and it's like I have to sit back and take a breath and be like, girl, breathe. Because even when they came out with the, I'm not sure if y'all remember, but there was this post that was going around that trans women were having an issue with the song—with Aretha Franklin song, Natural Woman.

I said on behalf of the real black trans women's committee, baby, we do not have a issue. That is something that someone has made up to try to cause conflict amongst us to continue this unnecessary battle of back and forth. So it's just a constant, you know, constant battle, but it takes strong minded people to go out here and put our lives on the line every single day regardless of how we show up. We know people gonna have a issue. Even if I could just speak, you know, presently today, you know, I saw on 13WMAZ's website that the club down in Perry were receiving threats because they were just talking about having a drag show. And so, I said this is really unfortunate. I said, because no one is telling you that you have to go. You don't have to go to spaces where you're gonna be uncomfortable. And my thing is for a business to be an ally is what we need, because for me, when I saw that, I was like okay so a business wants to run the drag show. Maybe there could be a conversation there where we can try to maybe employ someone as maybe a bartender, you know, get someone employed there, you know, for financial stability and sustainability. So that's where my mind goes, because I don't want people to always think or believe that we have to sell our bodies in order to take care of ourselves, because that's not everyone's story. Now I do believe that sex work is work, but I do believe at the same time, we have to understand the necessary pros and cons that do come with when you're selling your body. And it's just not for trans. Everyone does it because you have to do what you have to do to survive, especially nowadays. So, I don't knock anything.

I'm just grateful that I do have a, you know, I do have a job, but I do encourage them to pick up a trade, to pick up skills that they can go—I'm like if you're good at doing hair, you know, I have a scholarship program. You know, it's not a lot. It's five hundred dollars. But it's something to help you get started. And the reason why I did that was because when I was in high school, trans individuals made up less than one percent of college attendees, and it was even less than that for those of us who graduated. And so I was like I wanna be able to encourage, even if it's not college, if it's trade school, if it's a program, and the program will allow them to, well we'll catapult them into a career that would be great. Just anything to get out of that space. And so that's one reason why I developed the scholarship program. And I also did it FUBU style because I felt like—and FUBU means 'for us by us'—I did it that way because I feel like that if something is coming genuinely from your community, you would take that, and you would do your very best to pass that same energy on and pay it forward once you become how—whatever you wanna do. And you say you know what? I'll never forget a trans organization helped me get to this place. And so let me go and do something for the next trans girl, the next trans man or nonbinary, gender non-conforming that's coming up too because I know how hard it was for me to—someone took the time embedded on me simple five hundred dollars, and I was able to get a, you know, a certificate or complete a program. And so that's why I do what I do, and I'm always advocating and advocate and active, advocating for us to show up and be in spaces where it makes people uncomfortable. Because, like I've always said, if I show up in a space and it makes you uncomfortable, then I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. Because that lets me know that who I am is triggering whatever biases that you have, and that's the

window of opportunity for me to be able to come and have a conversation with you if you're ready. Because some people, let's just be honest, like to live in ignorance. And that's what I've noticed just over the years of the history of NOMO. Some people just like to live in ignorance, and I'm like that's fine. That's fine.

And then, I have to speak to this as well, that even in our Black community still like to live in ignorance when it comes to not understanding intersectionality is a real thing. While we all have one common goal, which I believe is that common goal is just us being human, we all meet at different socioeconomic, you know, intersections, health, you know, how we show up, what are we eating, what side of town we're staying—going—all of those things intersect at some point, and we meet somewhere along those lines. And so, like, I—and this is just a true story—so I reached out to Macon Black Culture. I believe they're a fairly new organization in Macon. Been doing a lot of good work down there. I noticed them on my Instagram, and I was like oh, Macon Black Culture. Okay, so they for us then. They for, you know, for Black culture. So I had one of my executive board members. I said can you draft up a letter and reach out to them? And this was in March. And so we sent the letter in March and was like hey, we just, you know, wanted to introduce ourselves and see if there's a way for us to, you know, work together being that you all are a Black-led organization. We're a Black-led organization. Our focus is on LGBTQ rights, human rights, specifically for Black trans women and non-binary individuals. However, we are open to assisting and advocating for everyone because it's just a human right. And so this was in March. And so we asked them about coming together and having a roundtable conversation during the Juneteenth events, because I knew they do a lot of things during Juneteenth. And so we didn't hear anything back from them until after Juneteenth. And I reached out to the co-founder. I said hey. I was like we've been trying to get in contact with you all for a while. I said I've inboxed you all directly. You all have read my messages and left me on read. I said, so I would love to have a conversation with you as a co-founder because I've—because like I told her, as a founder of an organization myself and being a black woman as a co-founder, I told her—I said we need to have a conversation. I said, because while I see what you all are doing, there's so much exclusivity in what you all are doing. I said we haven't—LGBTQ people haven't shown up at all in these spaces. I was like, so we need to have a conversation about that. And so she was like okay, we can do that. And she was like do you accept my apology for not reaching back out? So we'll see what happens, but that's just one of the many examples of how difficult it can be and sometimes how abnormal and uncomfortable it can be for some people to want to just sit down and have a conversation. Because I feel like at the end of the day, if the common goal is human rights for everybody, we can't leave people out because of differences. You know?

I've made a post up under 13WMAZ's post with that, and someone commented up under my comment and was like well, I wouldn't want to be there if, you know, nobody—if—she said something to the fact of, well, if I wasn't invited to a place, why wouldn't I be there? I was like well, ma'am, you weren't invited. You weren't. You've made it clear that this is not a space where you wanna be, so why would you show up? Why would you spew out hatred if you know you're not gonna be there? I was like this—I was like this is the issue. We so quick to say things and then not understanding diversity in humanity—that we all show up differently. And I said to threaten people—as a human right, it's their right to show up to a bar. It's the bar's owner's right to have a drag show if they want to do that. No one is infringing on anybody's rights. If you don't wanna show up because it ain't your thing, okay! No harm, no foul. No one's mad. Nobody's mad. But if you show up, understand you're gonna see a drag show. You're gonna see some gay folks. You're gonna see some trans folks. I mean, you're gonna see and we're gonna have a good time. And when you come, don't come with the negativity, because you know, lord knows, I love Michelle Obama. You know what she say? Well, when we go high—when they go low, we go high, baby. No. No. I'm like—I'm like Jasmine Crockett at this point. When they go low, baby, I go to hell. Because, you know, sometimes you have to, I feel like—especially now how politicized they have made LGBTQ rights, especially trans health—you know, you have to go there with them. Even when it comes to women, because I'm a starch advocate for women's reproductive rights. If they—baby ain't no man, even a trans woman, has no business telling a cisgender woman, non-binary, and a trans man what they should be doing with their uterus. I'm sorry. That ain't my business. And I've been telling trans men this for the longest. Y'all better start speaking up for y'all selves. Because I get on them too. I was like I'm a pre-op trans woman. I haven't had surgery yet. I said so I'm not here advocating for y'all's uteruses. I don't have one. Because I want you all to be able to have families and do whatever you, you know, y'all wanna do if that's what your desire is. It's not my place. It's not Supreme Court's place. It's nobody's place. It's whomever have a uterus and their doctor, point blank period. And so I'm just for people. I don't know how to do or be anything else. I'm for people. If I see something wrong and injustice, if you see me with my sign, just know I'm coming. I don't mind. I don't care about being arrested. They don't bother me. I stand on my First Amendment right. I feel like I can say whatever I wanna say. If it's a public road, I'm gonna stand on it with my sign. Like I've always said, who gonna check me boo? So, so, yeah, that's just kinda where—I hope that wasn't too much y'all because I, you know, I get it going."

Bekehm: I've been looking at my questions. I'm like, okay, hit hit hit. Okay. Great.

Raven: Yeah. And I honestly love that you brought up the—because were you talking about Main Street? The Main Street bar?

"Yes, yes. That's it."

Raven: Yeah. I heard—I actually heard about that earlier, because someone that I know, he was supposed to be part of that drag show.

“Yeah.”

Raven: And I heard earlier about the threats, and I was like, oh.

“I just got the text message from one of the organizers said that they canceled it. So I’m gonna personally reach out to that bar owner and ask them if we can do something there still and tell them to bring it on. Because like I told him, I was like, this is the purpose of—that was what they did at Stonewall. I just did a teaching about Stonewall, because—and it goes back to why trans women are so intricate in the fight for civil rights and human rights, because when those who were female presenting refused to show their ID to the police, that’s when they was like enough is enough. I should not have to show a ID to tell you who I am. Lucy, I think her—Lucy Henderson was the first black trans woman that stood up for herself when it came down to the ID. See, I tell people this goes back to the nineteen twenty because she was married. She was married to a man, and so her husband was in the military or the army. And so when he died, she was getting his benefit. And so when they found out that she wasn’t a ‘woman,’ biological woman, they threw her in jail, had her go through a psychiatric evaluation, and she told the psychiatrist, ‘Who gon’ tell me I’m not a woman?’ Point blank period. I’ll wait. So, she did her time in jail. She opened up a brothel and, because someone said they caught syphilis or a STD or STI, they ended up shutting it down. But even so, then, this fight about ID and how people show up goes all the way back then. It’s crazy. Over a hundred years, over a century, and we’re still fighting about how should a person label themselves on a ID. It’s none of your damn business. So we’re talking about history repeating itself. This is why I tell people there’s nothing new under the sun. Trans people have always been here. Always have been here. And I’m sorry, I just get real passionate y’all.”

Raven: No. Don’t apologize.

“I just get real passionate about it. And so I just—you know? And my thing is, while I do hold true to some Christian teachings—I don’t fall upon the diaspora of, Christian theology anymore. I consider myself as an omnist. And so I believe that, you know, you can sense and experience God in not just religion, but in nature and just through any and everything. Even through this conversation we’re having, I feel like there’s a sense and a level of energy of interconnectedness that we all have that always goes back to the source of all things. So that’s how I am now as a person as far as, like, if, you know, when people ask me what’s my religion, I say I don’t have one. I say I just fall under the umbrella as an omnist.”

Bekehr: Can I ask you some clarifying questions?

“Yeah!”

Bekehm: You hit a lot of it. So now I'm like, okay. Let's see.

"Yeah, go ahead!"

Bekehm: Could you give some detail on why it is, for Macon at least, that black women are more susceptible to be at risk for HIV and AIDS? Is it, you know, the intersectionality issue?

"So . . . so, we had a conversation. I did Trans HIV Awareness Day, and we set it up at Centenary Ministry. Pastor Sarah, who's absolutely amazing. There was a woman. She was a case manager at Macon HOPE Center. And it troubled me when she said that this woman came in, and she tested positive for HIV. And she was under the impression that HIV was a gay disease and that only gay people could still get HIV. And so she thought that her partner was gay and had given it to her while sleeping with other men. And then on top of that, there's not enough education around HIV—understanding HIV is not AIDS. Two different things. And so because of the lack of education, because people still fear the word HIV and AIDS, and it's very taboo too, because even when I started having conversations and I developed the Melanated Women's Program, I wasn't sure how Macon would take it—how the women there would take it. But we had college students. We had married women. We had trans women. You know? We had lesbians. We had a very eclectic group. And so the information that, you know, we gave really, really opened up the eyes of those women, those black women, because they was like, 'Well, I didn't know this.' They didn't know what type of medications that they could be on, you know, as far as, preventative medications for PrEP. They didn't know, you know, about those things. And then if they are positive, you know, they were like, 'Well, I don't wanna be taking, you know, three or four or five pills,' not understanding that they're putting three pills in one pill. You know? And even now, they have the injectables where you can get an injection, you know, every six months. So because of the lack of funding, because of the lack of having the conversation about HIV, because no one really wants to be associated with it, but it's a real thing, and we really have to have a conversation about it. That's why the numbers are going up. And in addition to . . . when—let me say this. Because society has said that a man—and I'm just gonna say Black man—because a Black man is supposed to look and be this, anything outside of that we won't accept. So a lot of Black men have suppressed those feelings. And when they can't suppress it, they act out on those feelings of wanting to be sexually involved with men and trans women like myself. Then they—it's not that they run the risk, but there's always a risk when you sleep with anyone, whether they're positive or whether they're not positive. Because you still have, even though they may not have HIV, there's still the risk of STIs and STDs. So either way, there is a risk. But my thing has always been we have got to allow Black men to be in a space to have a conversation about how they feel sexually and how they want to identify and how they wanna show up. Because I feel like when a Black man says that he's bisexual, it's a cover. Not saying that he can't be, but when nine times out of ten, you're calling the trans woman at twelve to one o'clock in the morning because now your wife and your kids or your girlfriend and y'all baby or, you know, he's just in the bed sleeping now—they're in the bed sleeping now.

Now you're up and you have that sensation and that desire of you wanting to be touched by another man or a trans woman, you can't contain that. You're gonna go out here, and you're gonna act on those things. So I believe that we have done such a disservice to Black men and Black women, just the Black community period, not educating ourselves, not giving each other enough grace to say, 'Be who you want to be and be real about it.' I truly feel like once we get to that space and that place, then we'll—this is just my humble opinion—we won't see these really high rises and upticks in Black women contracting HIV because we're not giving men's space. We're not giving women's space. The lack of education, the lack of representation, also the lack of funding is a major major—I was having a conversation with the representative for Viiv, and I was telling them, because they consider Middle Georgia a PrEP desert, because we don't talk about PrEP. You don't see ads and things about it. You may see Biktarvy on TV or over the radio, you know, here and there, but we really don't have community wide conversations because people are still afraid, and we have to get out of that. We have to get out of our biases and stop stigmatizing people who are living with HIV and then those who are not living with HIV. Because we understand the stigma is there, but everyone enjoys sex. So we have to be real."

Bekehm: Transparency is key on every level.

"Absolutely. Absolutely."

Bekehm: Can you tell me anything about the historical impact of HIV/AIDS epidemic on Macon? Because in our research, that's kinda been—it wasn't spoken about.

"Nonexistent. I got the same thing. Before we started the Melanated Women's Empowerment Program, we was looking and trying to figure out where was the information for HIV historically first. How was it addressed? Did anyone talk about it besides, you know, talking to your doctor about it, who probably had their own biases even still at that time? And so, you know, honestly, we didn't even find anything. So our program really is the first program of its kind to have conversations about it. My thing is it's okay if your organization is centered around HIV. You know, you wanna give out condoms. You wanna do, you know, harm reduction things. I get that. At the same time, harm reduction is only one facet of it. You got to have a conversation about it. You got to have conversations about sex and the risk. You have to have conversations around inject—You can't be around here sharing needles, baby. Go get you a clean needle. And I'm just gonna—I'm gonna keep it real. Like, I don't wanna sugarcoat this because it's the real thing. And I really appreciate the fact that you all are willing to have this conversation with me and, you know, in my organization, because these are things that we're finding out. People don't want to talk about it. And when people don't wanna talk about something or when we do talk about it, they're like, 'Oh, but you oh, all them must have it.' No, baby. We all don't have it, but you need to be made aware. So the history of HIV, when it comes down to understanding, the only person I could tell you that really has any type of historic maybe information would be Dr. Katner.

[Redacted]

And, you know, he knows because he's been in this fight since the 80s. When it was AZT and then that was the medication. Even that was even stronger. And even before then, when they weren't giving black communities any medication, you had to have money or know somebody that knows somebody that knows somebody to get these medications. So even the history of it goes back to 'Shh, you don't say nothing.' So, unfortunately, we got the same research ya'll do."

Bekehm: I recognize his name, because I did see a lot of programs he was committing.

"Oh yeah, Dr. Katner—he is like a legend in my head. Yes."

Bekehm: In regards to your team, your team on your website seemed very impressive. I was just wondering what that dynamic is like when y'all are running all these events.

"So, so, alright. So, when it comes down to my team, my team is very eclectic. Very. And I love that fact. Everyone kinda moves and maneuvers how they want to, because we developed an Atlanta chapter as well. And so everyone just kinda knows their lane, but when we come together, we have conversations. You know? We're like a family. There are disagreements, you know, especially when we're having our team meeting and our board meeting, and we're trying to make sure that we keep the integrity of what NOMO is to the forefront. And, you know, in my bylaws, I make it 'Listen, if even if y'all agree on something and I still—and, for me personally, I still feel as if it does not reflect NOMO, I'm gonna shut it down.' Because at the core of what NOMO is, we are to help Black trans folks and non-binary folks because we have always been marginalized, and we have been disproportionately marginalized by—even in our own subcommittees, in our own sub, you know, groups. And so it's like when I have a girlfriend literally a thousand feet away from me that's doing sex work, and I'm on the app just wanna be like, 'Sister, you okay?' You know? Because I can tell people I'm on the grinders and the jacks, but I'm not on there to meet nobody. I'm on there to make sure that the girl that's down the street, they're trying to make a dollar, you know, so she can get herself something to eat, that she's okay. Like, girl, I see you a thousand feet away. If you need a safe space, let me know. I'll come pick you up. And so that's what my team knows about me, and they know I will run my mouth, and they know I don't take no mess. Because, like I tell them all the time, y'all have to understand y'all—even some of y'all living in privilege.

I said, so you have to remove your privilege and put yourself in the shoes of those that are out here, that are still trying to make it and survive on their own. I said we can come home and turn the lights on. They have to pay for a hotel. They may not even get a meal. I said, so it's important for us to make sure that we hold true to what NOMO—Navigating Omitted Minds Overtime. That is what we do. That is what we do. And so when we get together, it's a good time. But when we have our meetings, it could be intense sometimes, but we wanna make sure that we're giving and we're providing the best support and the best

services that we can, when it comes down to what we do. And the reason why it's so eclectic, because I like to hear diverse opinions, because I, like I said, I can't be everything for everybody, and I can't think of everything for everybody. So that's why I need a team around me that's constantly seeing things and have a different outlook on things that I may not have seen. Because I tell people all the time, I don't seem to know everything, and Lord knows I can be wrong, and I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that because I'm human. We all are. And if there's a better way of doing something, hey. Let's try it. Let's see what happens."

Bekehm: Could you tell me about, in anonymity of course, a particular person, just one story, that was significantly helped by the program and what their life was before and after?

"Yes. So we assisted a young lady through our scholarship program. She was referred to us via Facebook from an organization here in Atlanta. She wanted to go back to school, and she just needed some start up money for school. And so, she reached out to me. She was like, 'hey, I'm just trying to get back in school. I heard that you all have a scholarship program. Do y'all have any funding?' Because we have to make sure that we have funds for it. I said, yeah. I said we got funding for it right now. And so she reached out, and she did the application process. I don't pick them. I got a whole separate team doing it, because I don't want nobody to say that I show favoritism or anything like that. I have three educators that actually go through the process of reading it, and they make that determination, and they give it to my board, and then my board will give it to me. I sign off. And so, last I checked, she is still enrolled in her program, and she's almost done. I believe it was in cosmetology. And so she is almost done, and she wants to actually work on a business plan to open up her own beauty salon, because the girl can do some hair. I was like okay Miss Thang. So that's been, one story. And it—just very quickly—just one more story if I can. There was this homeless person that came up to me. They just met me off the side of the road, you know, because I like walking up and down the road. And so they was like, 'Could you help? I just need a room for me and my family tonight.' And so I was like let me see what I can do. So I reached out to my board, and I said hey y'all, we got a family in need. And so they was like well, what's going on? And then, unbeknownst to me, they were also living with HIV. And so they—not only were we able to get them in an extended stay, but we will also help them—we also helped them get into care as well. Even though we don't have direct services, we were able to connect them. So they're actually in care. They're undetectable now as well as his wife. So it's just really, really good what work we do over here."

Bekehm: Is there any one or collection of achievements or contribution that you're most proud of NOMO's accomplished? A lot. You've told us a lot of them, but they are just—the best one.

"I could just do one. I would say—I would have to say me starting NOMO because the organization itself has helped so many people, and we've gotten all kind of awards and accolades of that nature. But the organization itself from just from a thought and a need that was not in existence when I was growing up. So the organization itself is the achievement."

Bekehm: How have partnerships with other organizations impacted the outreach of NOMO?

“It’s been absolutely amazing! We have been able to partner with so many organizations and render services, supportive services, group therapy services, mental health services, get people certified, help people with job training skills, get people into care after they’ve been out of care, linking them to so many different things that they need in order to move forward. Bus passes, gas cars. Well, I mean, just everything. So all the organizations—like I’ve said before, NOMO can’t be the end all be all for everything, but what we can do, we offer. That’s why those partnerships are so important. Because what I can’t do, I know this organization can. And so it should have been really, really beautiful being able to partner with local organizations in Macon, in also Fort Valley State University. I would love to work with Mercer. I would love to work with you all.”

Bekehm: That was gonna be my next question. So here at Mercer, we—My Name Matters Campaign, this campaign I created. And in 2021, I was able to advocate for the Preferred Name Policy and had it implemented in August 2022. And this is, my project now, is restoring this history. And we’re trying to make sure it doesn’t get through the cycle again of like, it was great, it was monumental, and then forgotten. Great, monumental, forgotten. So what can Mercer do, or even on the student level or institutional level, to prevent this from happening?

“Okay. So I will say this. Keep doing what you’re doing. There’s so much power in storytelling, and we have to keep sharing the history of organizations like NOMO, because I’m the first, and still only, Black trans-led organization in Macon. You know? We’re doing a needs assessment on Saturday at our event so we could see what other services that we have, because now we have gotten the attention of HRC campaign, GLAD, and Gilead, and all these people, and they now they want to throw money at us, but we have to be able to show a need. So if Mercer in any kind of way ties in, because Mercer is a—it is an extremely respected school. Just not in, you know, Middle Georgia, but worldwide is extremely respected and to create an inclusive and affirming space for LGBTQ folks would be absolutely amazing, but just keeping things like this going, because if the history of who we are only shows up one or two times, we’re like, well, we know so many other people in the area that’s done so many beautiful things. You know? Who are they? What have they done? And I think that what you’re doing is so key and so vital because with Tangerine Summers, with her being the first drag queen of Macon, that’s history making. You know? NOMO being the first Black trans-led organization in—because we service not just Bibb County. We serve all twelve counties. And to that point, we’re extending out to Americans in Albany because of the need that’s even down there. So keeping things like this going is so vital for our representation, for us to show up. So when they go back in the archives and they, you know, wanna know well, you know, how was Mercer involved? Or what did Mercer do to keep the legacy of LGBTQ community leaders? They’ll be able to look back on this and say, oh, wow. So there was Tangerine Summers. There was NOMO. There was Raven. That—is it Bekehm?”

Bekehm: Yes ma'am.

“There was Bekehm. Okay. You know, so they'll be able to speak and say our names after we long gone from here. And we're like wow, Mercer really was very vital and pivotable. They've been pivotal, excuse me. And the work of our community and us showing up and being—showing up as our authentic selves. And when we—and figuring out ways to bring organizations into Mercer like NOMO. You know? What does NOMO do? You know? What are some things that NOMO can offer, you know, the university or a partner with the university to do certain things? All of those things are so vital to keep the history of NOMO and Mercer and those that have come after us going.”

Bekehm: You will definitely be hearing from me, because we're trying to get people more involved because the queer community at Mercer is strong but isn't the most supported for opportunity.

“Uh-huh.”

Bekehm: Hopefully, we're gonna bring them closer to campus.

“Yeah, because for Trans Day of Visibility, we reached out to Mercer, and I guess we weren't—I guess, you know, there were some things they weren't allowing us to do. And so we were like, because we had got the commissioners on board, our state representative, [Miriam] Paris, she was gonna come and speak because I had met her at the Capitol, and so she was gonna come. And so we were a little taken back by that. But if there is a very strong queer community and presence at Mercer, any way that NOMO can help out, please let us know. Even if it's just showing up for what you all are doing, let us know because I have the privilege of having a great job that will pay me to come and be there, you know, just to show up and show up as me. And I think representation is so important even on college campuses and showing the strength of that is so very important as well.”

Bekehm: You'll be hearing from me with invites for the many things we have planned for next semester. We have a lot of plans to bring people on the campus.

“Oh, good. Good. Good. Good. Well, listen. We are ready. We're so ready.”

Bekehm: Those are all my questions. So I'll read this little conclusion paragraph. But before that, do you have any final thoughts, opinion, statements? Hoorahs?

“I just wanna say thank you all so much for reaching out to me. This means more to me than you all know. It's always a privilege to be able to give back in whatever way that I can for making, you know, Macon is home for me. I grew up there, went to school there. And so I just wanna say thank you all so much for this, and you all keep going. And, anyway, like I said, we can help over here at NOMO.

[Redacted]

Do not hesitate because we're ready to do the work. We've been doing the work. So we wanna keep that going. And I honor both of you today."

[Redacted]



Additional DEI Initiatives and Clubs

Mercer's Integration: The Good, The Bad, and The Unfinished

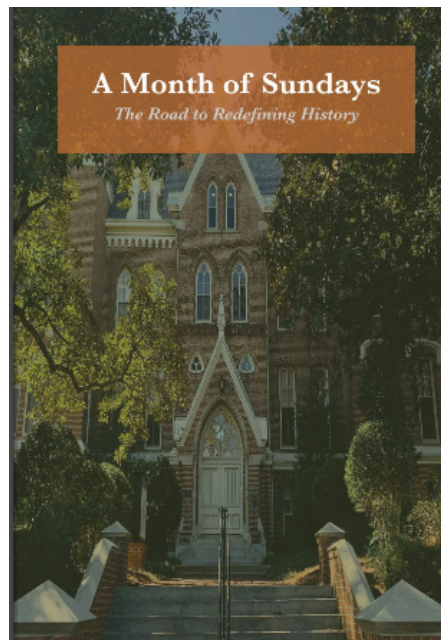
This was an exhibit that was devised by students of Dr. Natalie Bourdon and displayed in the Plunkett Gallery in November 2023. The students in ASJ 101, a class titled “Engaged Social Justice,” conducted research on Mercer’s past regarding many different minority groups and used their research to bring awareness to the lack of representation in the Mercer Archives. The exhibit itself was a physical timeline of history from 1963 to 2023, and it featured catalog copies as well as a suggestion box to encourage efforts toward a more equitable future. The Mercer Integration Museum was a driving force that inspired *Hidden Threads* as Bekehm Mohn realized the lack of LGBTQ+ representation in the Mercer Archives.

A Month of Sundays

Another significant project that arose from this exhibit was “*A Month of Sundays: The Road to Redefining History*.” This project was led by Bree Withrow and Jamyah Combs. They decided to curate a magazine titled *A Month of Sundays* which highlights the history, art, and evolution of Black people in both Mercer and the surrounding Macon area. We would also like to acknowledge the other contributing members to their project. Latoya Bartley and Aaliyah Deen Sesay contributed as writers; Precious Clark and Tamaya Morrison contributed as illustrators; and Naluchi Okonkwo contributed as the graphic designer.

We recommend our readers to check out their project at:

<https://online.fliphtml5.com/wpkuv/kcxu/#p=1>



Multicultural/Faith-Based Clubs

African Student Association	Mercer K-Pop Dance Team	A.G.A.P.E. Campus Ministry
Caribbean Student Association	Mercer Masala: A South	Muslim Student Association
Ethiopian Eritrean Student Association	Asian and Middle Eastern Collaborative	Baptist Collegiate Ministries Delight Ministries
Filipino Student Association	Mercer Vietnamese Student Association	Fellowship of Christian Athletes
International Bears Association	M.U. Lion Dance Club	Mercer Catholic Campus Ministry
Korean Undergraduate Student Association	Organization of Black Students	Reformed University Fellowship
Latin American Student Organization	Pakistani Student Association	UKirk ELF
Mercer Asian Society and Interest Association	Shalom Mercer (Mercer University Jewish Student Union)	Wesley of Macon Young Life

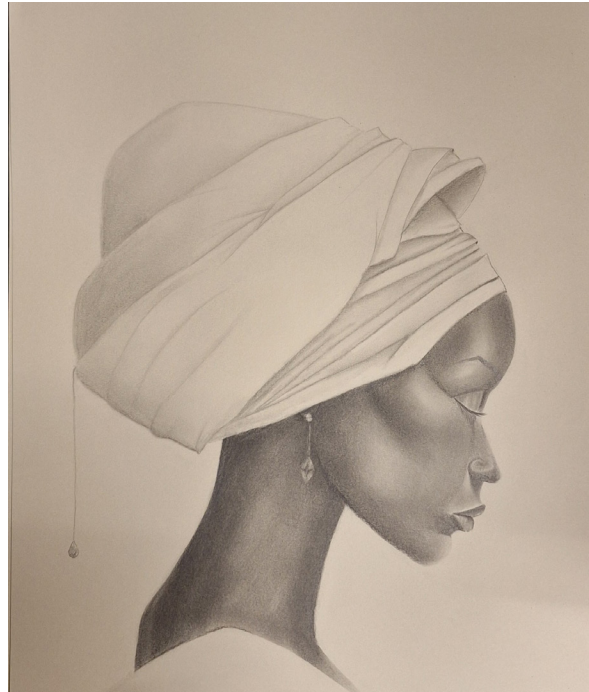
Arts

By Ren Schindler; Alumn 2024; Bachelor of Health Sciences in Kinesiology
The first piece is called

1. 'My Pronouns' and is made to be reminiscent of a name tag commonly worn when meeting new people. The idea of this piece was to encourage people to share their pronouns. It is also watercolor on paper.
2. 'The Perfect Body' was made to highlight the folds we all have. This was watercolor on paper.



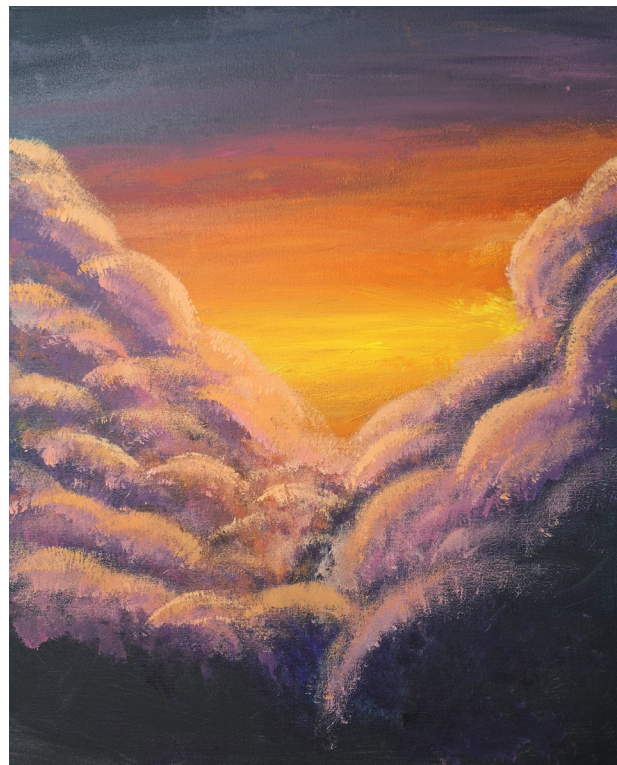
1. The first three pieces are called 'Soft As Hair, Strong As Diamonds', 'Everlasting Tears', and 'The Ring'. They are three pieces in a four piece set that was originally inspired by 'The Ring'. 'The Ring' is colored pencil on paper. 'Soft As Hair, Strong As Diamonds' and 'Everlasting Tears' are graphite drawings on paper.
2. The last three pieces are untitled landscape paintings. They are acrylic on canvas.



Raven Dupree, 'Soft As Hair, Strong As Diamonds', 2024, Graphite

Raven Dupree, 'Everlasting Tears', 2024, Graphite

Raven Dupree, 'The Ring', 2024, Colored Pencil



Raven Dupree, 'Untitled Landscape 1', 2024, Acrylic
 Raven Dupree, 'Untitled Landscape 2', 2024, Acrylic
 Raven Dupree, 'Untitled Landscape 3', 2024, Acrylic

Closing Remarks

Rainbow Connection Reinstatement

An additional goal of the My Name Matters Campaign in conducting this project was to expand resources and acceptance for LGBT+ identifying students, faculty and staff. We are happy to announce that Rainbow Connection will be reinstated for Spring 2025. Relaunching this training program aimed at educating and protecting LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff is a vital step toward fostering an inclusive and supportive campus environment. This initiative will provide essential resources and knowledge to empower individuals to understand the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. Through interactive workshops and open discussions, participants will gain insights into the importance of allyship, inclusivity, and mental health awareness. By creating a safe space for dialogue and learning, the program aims not only to raise awareness but also to implement strategies that actively protect and uplift LGBTQ+ identities within the academic setting. This renewed commitment will contribute to a culture of respect, understanding, and solidarity, ensuring that everyone feels valued and safe in their educational journey.

Thank you to Common Ground for working with our team to revive these resources.

Contribute to Your Archives

Contributing to your archives is crucial for preserving the rich history and diverse experiences within your community. By donating materials, you help ensure that future generations have access to valuable information that can educate and inspire. Additionally, a well-maintained archive serves as a resource for researchers, students, and the general public to explore and understand the past, fostering a deeper connection to cultural heritage. You can also archive your own sentimental materials. Learn how to archive at home from Invisible Histories, an organization dedicated to preserving queer history across the south. You can learn these skills at:

<https://invisiblehistory.org/archiving-from-home/>

Credits to Contributors

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the following individuals and organizations who contributed to the creation of this book:

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American Psychological Association

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We grant to Dr. Fox, of course, a perfect right to liberty in the matter of his religious beliefs, but we do not think it legal or the moral right to hold to the beliefs he claims to teach in Mercer University. We, therefore, recommend that Dr. Fox be requested to resign his professorship in Mercer University at once.

If he declines to so resign, we recommend that you declare the position vacant and proceed to fill it with some suitable person.

We believe that primarily the responsibility for this trouble rests with Dr. Fox. He knew when he entered the University how utterly at variance with those of the Georgia Baptists who were expelled he had been as frank in disclosing them then as he is now, the trouble would not have arisen, as he could not have been elected to the position.

Nevertheless, we do not believe there was the slightest fault on his part to conceal anything or to be unfair in any way; therefore, we

to cover financial